

# The Experience of International Students in Ontario Universities

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## Abstract

This thesis uses qualitative research methods to examine the experiences of international students in universities across Ontario. The number of international students in Canada is significant, with over 494,525 foreign students in 2017 (Katem, 2018). However, little research has focused on experiences of international undergraduate students within Canada. My research goal was to allow international students to speak to their own experiences. As part of my research, I conducted interviews with six international students studying in Ontario universities, and coded the data to determine themes that emerged. Themes included reasons for attending university in Ontario, the cost of education, social connections within the province, and discrimination faced within their communities and university environments. Analysis of the recorded data was completed using grounded theory. This research shows areas in which Ontario universities are doing well in supporting their international students, while also providing improvement suggestions for other areas of support.

*Keywords: international students, post-secondary, education, university, Ontario*

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Canadians often pride ourselves on our multiculturalism. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act says that Canada must, “recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada’s future” (Government of Canada, 2014). Immigrants and newcomers to Canada play an integral role in our country’s success. Edmonston notes, “[t]he 2011 census counted 6.8 million foreign-born residents in Canada” (2016, p. 82), and it seems likely that this number will continue to increase, given that “compared with early in the 20th century, immigration levels are moderately higher, emigration is considerably lower, and net immigration is twice as large” (2016, p. 83). Ontario, and specifically Toronto, is particularly popular with newcomers to Canada, with “Toronto alone receiv(ing) approximately 40 percent of all newly arrived immigrants in recent decades (Edmonston, 2016, p. 88).

However, amid our self-praise on our inclusive ways, Canadians do not often examine what multiculturalism means to all people in our country. For instance, “[t]he myth of multiculturalism claims that racial equity and harmony exist in Canada and that Canada consistently supports a high quality of life for everyone, be one white or settler, Indigenous, or a ‘visible minority’” (Simpson, James, & Mack, 2011, p. 287). The Montreal Gazette has reported that there are approximately twenty hate groups operating in Ontario, some specifically targeting immigrants (Solyom, 2016). Obviously, our culture is not as welcoming to newcomers to Canada as we often believe. How does this affect international students who are coming to Canada to study?

As globalization plays an increasingly important role in our world, so does its effect on post-secondary institutions in Canada. Mitchell and Nielsen argue that this is changing our institutions, as they state that “[f]rom the social process transformation perspective, globalization is having a transformative effect on the core functions of institutions of higher education” (2012, p. 7). They proceed to argue that there are multiple kinds of globalizations taking place in universities, such as economic globalization where education is commodified, and social and cultural globalization, which can both bring together diverse groups of people but also cause strife as differences become contentious. Given this, it is important to look at the experiences of international students who are studying in Ontario universities.

### **Background to the Problem**

It is clear that international students are key to Ontario universities’ success. The Government of Canada highlights the value of “the (International Student Program) in contributing to Canada’s economic needs through the potential future immigration and integration of international students in Canada. International students are recognized for their potential to easily integrate given their language skills and Canadian experience, and are thus desirable candidates for immigration” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada Evaluation Division, 2010, p. 14). The government also recognizes that “International students bring with them many benefits to Canada, including increased revenues to educational institutions and communities and enhanced diversity to learning environments and smaller communities” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada Evaluation Division, 2010, p. ii).



Despite the government's acknowledgement of the value in welcoming international students to our universities, these same students report encountering several problems when studying within Western countries. Social isolation remains a tremendous issue for international students, as they do not feel they are accepted by their domestic peers. A student studying in the Maritimes reports, "[i]t is easy to find Chinese friends here [at university in Nova Scotia] and they are my close friends, but I cannot find Canadian friends. I hope I can find close Canadian friends, that when I am upset I can talk to" (Chira, 2013, p. 26). Students also report having problems navigating the bureaucracy of universities, which can often stymie their efforts to be successful.

Racism against international students is another major concern. Brown and Jones found that of their 153 participants, "[...] almost one third (49) of students experienced racism, and some experienced multiple incidents" (2013, p. 1010). The acts of racism international students encountered while studying in England was not limited to verbal attacks. These students described a myriad of forms of racism, including physical attacks as they reported "being told to go back to their own country [...], missiles thrown [...], physical assault [...], pejorative comments about the home country [...] and aggressive laughter [...]" (2013, p. 1010).

International students also struggle with what they view as a lack of support from universities. For example, "personal counseling services have been rated with a significant level of importance" to international students, but they were not satisfied with the services they were receiving (Munoz & Munoz, 2000, p. 11). As Choudaha has noted, "[b]y continuing to increase tuition and fees for international students without a proportionate reinvestment in their success, some institutions are on the slippery slope of

treating international students as cash cows” (2017, p. 6). Students also report needing help with new learning styles. For example, as Andrade discovered, “[s]tudents from Asia and Polynesia noted teaching style differences between classrooms in their home countries and in the United States” (2006, p. 70), but universities were not prepared to offer the students the help they needed to achieve success. Steinmetz and Mussi (Steinmetz & Mussi, 2012) report similar difficulties adjusting to a ‘Western’ teaching style.

### **Problem Statement**

The research shows that international students face a myriad of relegations during their education. However, much of this research focusses on experiences outside of Canada, and specifically Ontario. Do international students studying in Canada experience the same type of marginalization reported in other parts of the Western world? Does the multiculturalism and diversity found within Ontario mean that they perceive their university experience differently from other international students?

My locus in this study is as a secondary school teacher at a large international school. Most of my students come to Canada to complete their grade 12 courses, and then move onto a Canadian – and primarily Ontarian – university. Do these students go on to be successful? Based on personal experiences related by former students who have returned to visit with me, I know that many report marginalization and oppressive experiences during their studies. Therefore, how do their experiences, particularly social and emotional experiences, shape their education and their success?

### **Research Question**

Based on the research problems, the research question that will be answered through this study is: ‘What are the experiences of international students studying in Ontario Universities’?

### **Purpose of the Study**

As bell hooks notes, “we must change conventional ways of thinking about language, creating spaces where diverse voices can speak in words other than English or in a broken, vernacular speech” (hooks, 1994, p. 173). This quote is particularly apt when considering the experiences of international students in Ontario. Many of these students are facing multiple intersections of marginalization – race, religion, language, culture, ethnicity, and education. Others may face even more oppression around gender, sexuality, and disability. With these marginalization areas at play, are international students able to make their voice heard? Can they share their experiences in a way that ensures their safety and allows their issues to be brought to the table? It is my intent that through amplifying the voices of international students, we may be able to encourage universities to continue the services that benefit their international student body, as well as evaluate changes that could strengthen the services provided to international students.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The goal of my research is to look at the experiences of international students within Ontario universities. The research was qualitative and completed by conducting and analysing interviews with six international students currently working on their first undergraduate degree at an Ontario university. Interviewees were recruited through an invitation letter (Appendix A) sent, with the school’s approval, to alumni who graduated

within the past 5 years from the institution at which I teach. This, of course, poses two limitations. Firstly, the students had already studied at least one semester in an Ontario secondary school and are conceivably better prepared for Ontario universities than an international student coming directly from their own country. Secondly, these students knew me personally, and due to this may not have been as candid about their experiences, as they may feel ashamed of any negative experience and may also want to portray success to a member of their secondary school. However, it is also possible that participants were more willing to openly share their experiences since they personally knew the interviewer and may be vested in the nature of this study.

Furthermore, the study only focussed on six students. Time limitations kept the participant group from being larger. This number is not enough to make any overarching conclusions about international students. However, that is not the purpose of qualitative research. Instead, our goal is to examine individual experiences, and use that information to study themes and, if possible, create grounded theory.

### **Outline of Thesis**

In chapter two, Literature Review, I evaluate the research on international students. By analyzing this research through an anti-oppressive lens, my goal is to examine how universities have supported the success of their international students and the problems they face, as they progress through their post-secondary studies. As well, I will consider the contributions that international students bring to post-secondary institutions and the ways that globalization of education has benefited both universities and students. This chapter helps to contextualize the issues that may be affecting the education of Ontario's international students.

In chapter three, Methodology, I consider my research. First, I discuss my location, which as a white woman with much privilege is essential to consider before completing anti-oppression research. Secondly, I examine the value of qualitative research and explain how my research can be considered the base for grounded theory. Thirdly, the importance of the interview process in anti-oppressive research is evaluated. This is followed by my procedure in terms of informing participants in regards to the interview questions as well as considering the value of their input through the research process. Fourthly, I discuss how the data will be analyzed through coding. Finally, challenges to the research are considered.

In chapter four, Study Results, the participants' interviews are discussed. The data obtained from the interviews is coded, which in turns highlights common themes amongst the participants.

In chapter five, Implications and Discussion, I discuss the findings and evaluate how they could be used by universities to better serve their international student population. I also discuss how the gathered data could be used for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Background on International Post-Secondary Students Studying in Canada**

In 2008, the federal government identified over 31,000 international students studying in post-secondary institutions within Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada Evaluation Division, 2010), with the vast majority residing in Ontario (Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Canada, 2014). The government set a public target to become “a world leader in international education”. To that end in 2014, they aimed to increase the number of international students studying in Canada, at every level of education, to 450,000 by the year 2022 (Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Canada, 2014, p. 4). By 2017, Canada had already surpassed this goal, with 494,525 international students studying in Canada (Katem, 2018). 370,710 of those students were studying in post-secondary schools, with 237,280 (48%) studying in Ontario (*International Students in Canada*, 2017). That number seems likely to keep increasing, as a 119% increase in international students studying in Canada between 2010 and 2017 has been reported (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018). In this chapter, I focus on the literature reviewing the experiences of international students in a world where education, and particularly post-secondary education, is becoming increasingly internationalized. I will review both positive and negative aspects encountered by international students. Positive aspects will include personal growth, formation of new relationships, possibility of permanent immigration, low-tuition costs, and accommodations provided by universities. Negative aspects will include the risk of failure, lack of interaction with domestic students, differences in education styles, unclear vision of university life, poor guidance from university, marginalization, and language difficulties. I will also review

the advantages and disadvantages of the high international recruitment cost on Canadian students and institutions (including economic, education and cultural exchange). To conclude, I will make recommendations for further areas of inquiry.

### **Internationalization of Education**

Qiang has stated that “[i]nternationalization of higher education is seen as one of the ways a country responds to the impact of globalization, yet at the same time respects the individuality of the nation,” and notes that “[a] country’s unique history, indigenous culture(s), resources, priorities, etc., shape its response to and relationships with other countries” (2003, p. 249). More so than other similar countries who wish to recruit large numbers of international post-secondary students, such as the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom, Canada is viewed as a society where immigrants are welcomed, and their cultures are accepted (and even celebrated), which makes it a prime location for internationalization of higher education. We live in the age of multiculturalism in Canada—the time where we proudly pronounce Ontario the most diverse province in the country and Toronto the most diverse city in the world (Price & Benton-Short, 2007). The creed of multiculturalism is one that has been preached throughout Canada since the original policy was announced in 1971. The intent of the act is undeniable virtuous, with the very first tenet stating that Canadians should “recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage” (Government of Canada, 2014). Conceivably, this perceived welcoming attitude should make it easier for international students to integrate here than in other countries. Qiang also stresses the importance of internationalization being a full

institutional approach when stating, “[t]his calls for a broader definition of internationalization, which embraces the entire functioning of higher education and not merely a dimension or aspect of it, or the actions of some individuals which are part of it” (2003, p. 249). Is Canada prepared for this kind of internationalization, where all parts of the university community must work together to ensure the success of not only international students, but also to ensure that our domestic students are educated to work in an increasingly global workforce? As Trahar questions, “[t]o what extent are we all, academics and students, perpetuating a form of neo-colonialism if we do not reflect critically on our approaches to learning and teaching when working alongside people from different academic traditions? (2010, p. 144)

While we need to reflect on how the internationalization of Canadian universities benefits the international students, it obviously must also serve to benefit our country. Qiang proposes that through the internationalization of higher education, we create an educational system that is “open and responsive to its global environment” (2003, p. 250). Using this standard as a framework, I was able to employ the literature to identify the ways in which Canada will benefit from ensuring that international students flourish. Education is often idealized as providing pupils with the tools and skills they need to gain knowledge and thus is theoretically separate from political and economic sensibilities. However, the reality of modern post-secondary education is replete with bureaucracy and the constant need to justify the cost of learning in the return of dollars and cents to the institution. This leads to constant tension between what is termed “contemporary organizational sociology” (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012, p. 17). As Mitchell and Nielsen further state:



The internationalization of universities puts this need for a coherent culture (where moral, normative and symbolic dimensions of organizational behavior are more important to organizational stability and success than are rational, means-ends productivity considerations) at the center of organizational effectiveness, creating significant tensions between the entrepreneurialism and neo-liberal managerialism with their emphasis on competitive processes and the neo-institutional corporate need for a more collaborative and culture building process which is more fragile in character and requires more substantial social interaction than is often produced in international educational ventures. (2012, p. 17).

This means that universities are faced with the constant struggle of either upholding the lofty ambitions of education, where all are entitled to knowledge, or the harsh financial realities and needs.

### **Positive Aspects of Internationalization of Canadian Education**

Both universities and students have much to gain from participating in international studies. As Guo and Chase note, “internationalization represents the positive exchange of ideas and people” (2011, p. 305). Within the literature, three themes regarding the internationalization of Canadian education were identified as being particularly beneficial to Canada, its universities and students. These were economic benefits, educational advantages for domestic students and cultural exchange opportunities for the institutions ultimately strengthening both relationships with and knowledge of other countries and cultures. The five themes identified that were beneficial to international students studying in Canada are low education costs, opportunities leading to immigration, opportunities for personal growth, support from the institutions, and the development of new relationships.

### **Positive Aspects for Universities and Host Countries**

**Economic.** There is no doubt that the internationalization of Canadian education has led to considerable financial benefits to Canada and post-secondary institutions. In 2017, the international students contributed \$15.5 billion to Canada while ensuring 170,000 jobs for Canadians (Roslyn Kunin and Associates Inc., 2017). The benefits of this money is spread throughout country, as students shop, eat and live in the communities surrounding their schools. In fact, international education has become the fourth largest export market in Canada (Roslyn Kunin and Associates Inc., 2017). In the United States of America, “[f]or every 7 international students enrolled, 3 U.S. jobs are created or supported by spending” (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, n.d., p. 1). Additionally, international students paid over \$455 million in federal and provincial taxes (Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Canada, 2014). While these numbers apply to all international students, not just those studying in universities, the economic benefit is clear. One of the six benefits listed in Alberta’s International Education Strategy directly relates to the financial benefits of international students attending Albertan educational institutions. As described in the document, “[i]nternational investment and trade of Alberta's goods and services will be enhanced by the sale of associated skills training and other educational programs and services” (2001, p. 7). In 2001, they estimated that the contribution of each student was “from \$20,000 to \$30,000 per annum to the provincial economy” (Alberta Learning Edmonton. Learning and Teaching Resources Branch, 2001, p. 11). Tuition fees for international students are significantly higher when compared to fees paid by domestic students. International students pay, on average, more than three times the tuition of domestic students (Statistics Canada, 2014). As of the 2018/2019

school year, “the average tuition fees for international undergraduate students rose 6.3%” (Statistics Canada, 2018). The price difference is justified by the fact that international students are paying close to the actual tuition costs in Canada, while domestic students are subsidized by Canadian tax dollars (Kenyon, Frohard-Dourlent, & Roth, 2012). As Canadian institutions see their government subsidies cut, international students, “are increasingly also viewed as an important —even essential— source of revenue by post-secondary institutions in these times of declining government subsidies for higher education” (K. Lee & Wesche, 2000, p. 638). The NAFSA makes the same argument in the United States of America when affirming that international students help to “[s]upport programming and services on campus for all students by paying out-of-state tuition, funded largely by non-U.S. sources” (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, n.d., p. 1). By ensuring our institutions continue to focus on the internationalization of their education, Canada will continue to reap the considerable financial benefit. That said, there can be little doubt that as Mitchell and Nielson argue, internationalized higher education has become part of the “consumerist mentality” (2012, p. 7) —to be bought and sold on the open market.

**Educational.** Internationalization has also been shown to provide significant educational benefits for Canadian students. Domestic students are believed to benefit from their exposure to international student peers. In a study examining international students within Canada, Skinkle and Embleton found that administrators in institutions with international students felt that domestic students had “[e]nhanced learning and personal development [...] resulting from studying alongside international students” (2014, p. 48). Indeed, in an

address to Fulbright Scholars in Boston, MA, the Governor General of Canada referred to this sharing of information across cultures as knowledge diplomacy:

The process of uncovering, sharing and refining all kinds of knowledge across disciplinary boundaries and international borders is something I call the diplomacy of knowledge. As a student of history, I understand that civilization's greatest advances often came not wholly from within certain disciplines but at the intersections of different disciplines. While cross-disciplinary action can be conducted locally, regionally and nationally, it's most potent when we cross international borders and cultivate interactions among teachers, students, researchers and others in different countries. (D. Johnson, 2013)

The NAFSA also provides a unique argument for the advantage of including international students in classrooms, as they “[s]upport U.S. innovation through science and engineering coursework, making it possible for U.S. colleges and universities to offer these courses to U.S. students” (n.d., p. 1). Similarly, Gribble notes that “in the United States international students have been pivotal to the advancement of science and engineering, as evidenced by the numbers of patents, publications and Nobel prizes” (Gribble, 2008, p. 27).

As well, the unique learning styles that international students bring to our classrooms benefit domestic students. As Wang notes, “international students’ different ways of constructing knowledge rather than being regarded as problematic and needing to be corrected, illustrated an acknowledgment and showed value of their different cultural ways of learning preferences, which also recognized the benefits that international students could bring to our multi-cultural classrooms in Australia” (2012, pp. 74–75).

Sherry, Thomas and Chu note that universities that serve international students particularly well have the opportunity to enhance their reputation, particularly in the area of being recognized for being student-centered (2010). Host students also seek out international students for assistance in academic areas where they are weak (Dunne, 2013), thereby strengthening their own academic abilities. Furthermore, international students are key to providing education for domestic students, working as teaching assistants within institutions (Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, & Nelson, 1997). Beyond these benefits, the internationalization of Canadian universities is necessary for prestige. The gains in globalized knowledge provided by internationalization allow universities to “[seek] the power and prestige of symbolic knowledge, [as] higher education institutions are encouraged to pursue internationalization of recruitment faculty and students and to secure recognition for knowledge production” (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012, p. 7).

**Cultural Exchange.** One of the strengths of internationalizing Canadian post-secondary education is the exchange of culture (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Madgett & Belanger, 2008). This allows our classrooms to be filled with different points of view and (hopefully) help students, both domestic and international, to learn how to discuss and negotiate differing points of view in a respectful way. Indeed, “internationalization emphasizes students as central players in intercultural exchange and diplomacy between nations” (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 385). In another paper, Lee goes on to explain this further when saying that “[t]he United States educates many who take leadership positions in other nations, which can also build goodwill between countries” (J. J. Lee, 2007, p. 28). When looking at reasons why domestic students chose to interact with

international students, Dunne found that they believed that it allowed them to participate in cultural exchange (2013), and often planned to use that experience during their education. In a study of students who were part of racially (but not internationally) diverse classrooms, researchers found that these students showed “greater openness to diverse perspectives” (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2009, p. 80). Monash University in Australia, focused on promoting their own international education program with the belief that attracting international students resulted in “fostering appropriate skills and outlooks for graduates who will be operating in an increasingly international workforce” (McBurnie, 2000, p. 68). When specific programs encouraged domestic students to learn more about other cultures, those students were able “to participate in environments where differences are acknowledged and respected, reducing stereotypical thinking; and to see beyond city and state borders to understand U.S. interdependence with the world” (Peterson et al., 1997, p. 71).

### **Positive Aspects for International Students**

The Canadian government listed what it believes are the most tangible benefits for international students who choose to study in Canada. In their view, Canada can uniquely offer international students a world-class education at an affordable price. The benefits are, in their words:

- A welcoming, safe and multicultural country offering high-quality education at an attractive price;
- A global centre of innovation, research and development;
- A research partner of choice;
- State-of-the-art research facilities; and

- A world leader in skills development and other advanced skills for employment. (Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Canada, 2014)

**Personal growth.** International students associate their time of studying abroad with personal and academic growth due to in goals, and the ability to see the world in different ways (McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). These areas of growth can also benefit them later in terms of employment, particularly if they choose to become a Canadian citizen, given that the ability to work effectively with a wide variety of cultural groups is prized by employers. International students also report that they develop confidence in dealing with new situations, and are able to develop their independence as they find their way through a new educational system and culture (McLachlan & Justice, 2009). For many students, being abroad is the first time they have had personal responsibility and learn to relish the independence that comes as they develop their skills (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). International students also found that they were better able to set personal goals for themselves, likely due to this increased personal responsibility and gain knowledge of their individual capacities (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). They also developed better critical thinking skills and were able to analyze events and issues within their home countries with a more critical eye (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011).

**Formation of new relationships.** International students report being able to form new, family-like groups in their new destinations, helping provide support for other international students, while feeling supported themselves (McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). They also report being able to form friendships almost immediately with other international students, creating important support networks

necessary for their own emotional health (McLachlan & Justice, 2009). In fact, international students identified this informal support network, where other more experienced international students helped them to navigate through the educational and cultural systems of the new country, to be a major factor in their success and comfort in the new country (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011).

**Possibility of permanent immigration.** International students who choose to stay in Canada after they have finished their studies, are more likely to find employment than Canadian immigrants who undertook post-secondary education in their home countries (Kenyon et al., 2012). The Canadian government also prioritizes international students with Canadian educational credentials, should they choose to apply for a Canadian permanent residency (Government of Canada, 2015). Both of these options make international education very attractive for individuals who wish to remain in Canada after their education has been completed.

**Low tuition costs.** Canadian tuition fees for undergraduate studies are lower than in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States of America (Madgett & Belanger, 2008), with the Atlantic region of Canada having even lower fees than those found in Ontario (Chira, 2013). The cost of living in Canada is also lower than in the aforementioned countries (Madgett & Belanger, 2008). This makes Canada an attractive option regardless of the students' financial situation, and most particularly to those who do require financial assistance, given then overall education and living costs.

**University support.** Some Canadian universities are working to ensure that their international students are able to achieve success. The University of Western Ontario, for example, developed a remarkably comprehensive manual for their graduate students



working as teaching assistants (LeGros, 2009), discussing differences in cultural communication, cultural expectations in Canada and information about everyday life. However, it should be noted that this manual is written only for graduate students who will be teaching, where cultural miscommunication could become problematic for the university. No such manual seems to exist for undergraduate students, who may have the same issues attempting to navigate Canadian society.

### **Negative Aspects of International Study**

bell hooks has observed, “[n]o education is politically neutral” (1994, p. 37). Internationalization of our classrooms holds tremendous advantages, but it is also difficult and often problematic. Just as “[m]ulticulturalism compels educators to recognize the narrow boundaries that have shaped the way knowledge is shared in the classroom” (hooks, 1994, p. 44), internationalization in higher education requires that we consider the ways in which international students are not welcomed into our educational systems. International students go through a frightening journey - one that silences them - as they attempt to integrate in to a country with unfamiliar societal customs, language and nuances of communication. The new educational system may result confusing and intimidating, especially in higher education where one is judge by how others perceive your intelligence. As hooks states:

Academics fear confessing that we don't have the 'answer' because we are afraid that audiences will shame us, or worse, see us as not very smart. When one adds race, gender and class into the equation it comes all the more risky to be perceived as not worthy, not good. (2010, p. 67)

Culture is used to determine what is acceptable within our educational system. As McCarthy and Dimitriades state, “[w]ithin the managerial language of the university, culture has become a useful discourse of containment, a narrow discourse of ascriptive property in which particular groups are granted their nationalist histories, their knowledges and, alas, their experts” (2000, p. 188). This view, where certain cultures are more valued, allows Canadian universities and their respective communities to ignore the myriad of problems international students face, placing blame on students when they fail, rather than acknowledge their inadequate support.

Furthermore, we would justify this blame by minimizing their culture, suggesting that students were not prepared for what we perceive as the vastly superior system of Canadian education. Therefore, students would not deserve a spot in our classrooms and should, indeed, return to their own countries and schools.

### **Risks for Institutions**

**Recruitment cost.** Whether good or bad, international students share lived experiences with close networks in their home countries (Peterson et al., 1997). This means that “[i]nstitutions that are not serving their students well both academically and socially risk failing to achieve their missions and incurring damage to their reputations” (Henard, Diamond, & Roseveare, 2012, p. 25). Plagiarism is also listed as a reason that international students are not retained, as some international students lack the proper education in academic citation, resulting in expulsions due to academic dishonesty. Rubin (2014) notes that education is needed to ensure that international students are aware of the different cultural standards regarding the need for original work. As international students share their negative experiences at an institution (or in a country), it becomes

significantly challenging and thus increasingly costly to recruit other students from that area (L. Brown & Jones, 2013; Hart & Coates, 2010). Due to their financial investment, international students see themselves primarily as consumers, and expect excellent customer service when raising complaints or concerns regarding their studies (Hart & Coates, 2010).

### **Risks for International Students**

**Risk of failure.** All students, whether domestic or international, are aware of the costs of failure within academia. Briggs, Clark and Hall note that “the move to university is a personal investment of the cultural capital accrued through school and college education” (2012, p. 3). International students however, face far greater risks in terms of failing. In a study by McLachlan and Justice, every international student participant reported challenges when balancing their school work and social lives (2009). Without being able to find that balance, failure is a very real possibility. “Returning to one’s home country with a poor degree or failure to get a degree would result in shame for the individual and family” (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002, p. 315). The financial cost of failure for international students is also remarkably higher than for domestic students. While scholarships for international students are rare and financial aid is not readily available (Chira, 2013), tuition costs are, on average, over three times more expensive (Statistics Canada, 2014). This does not even take into account the financial costs of moving to another country. These expenses put international students at particular risk. In addition, the risk of loss of status for families whose children failed to complete (or are at risk of completing) their studies should be considered. For international students, both the emotional costs of disappointing their family and the social stigma they may face upon

their return may be even higher than for domestic students. This means that universities need to be cognizant of the particular stress placed upon international students in terms of their academic success (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002).

**Lack of interaction with domestic students.** Studies have shown that social relationships with domestic peers are key to international students' well-being (McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011), however domestic students do not seem interested in developing relationships with their international peers. When analyzing the reasons for this, Williams and Johnson (2011) found that students who chose not to interact with international students were more closed-minded than those who did. They measured this quality by using the following operational definition for open-mindedness, where it "refers to an open and unprejudiced attitude towards outgroup members and towards different cultural norms and values" (van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2000). This lack of contact with domestic students leads to further segregation from the community. International students are often unsure about how to conduct activities such as shopping, searching for housing and traveling within the community (Madgett & Belanger, 2008). Williams and Johnson (2011) note that teaching domestic students open-mindedness is a possible way to help increase the relationships between domestic and international students. Domestic students also seem to avoid relationships with international students due to intercultural anxiety, since the thought of navigating through others' cultures is stressful (C. T. Williams & Johnson, 2011). Brown has hypothesized that the fear of experiencing racism push international students to separate themselves from domestic students, leading to ghettoization as a form of self-

protection (L. Brown, 2009). Thus, international students are often restricted to relationships with other international students.

The lack of positive social relationships with domestic peers has effects beyond the social realm. In a study from the Seychelles Islands regarding international students, this population reported additional classroom stress since instructors required them to interact with their domestic peers within the classroom; students felt othered, and unsure of how their efforts would be received on both academic and personal levels (Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2009). Naturally, feeling as an outcast in the classroom also leads to a tremendous increase in academic issues. International students will be less willing to participate (which will, of course, affect their assessment), less inclined to take risks by answering questions and less likely to seek help, leading to an inordinate amount of stress. When asked why domestic students would choose to spend time with international students, one replied “I suppose it’s different with every person really. It’s up to your needs and what would benefit you really” (Dunne, 2013, p. 572). While interracial interactions benefit both domestic and international students, it has been noted that “study[ing] abroad was negatively related to interracial interaction” (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2009, p. 78). This may imply that international students experience racial marginalization during their sojourns.

This type of exclusion is often keenly felt, not only socially, but also within the classroom. As reported by a 24-year-old Japanese female student, “[w]hen we were discussing in class, my American classmates form their own discussion groups. They didn’t want to include me and other international students. They think we are poor in English and may not contribute to the group” (Ee, 2013, p. 74). When students are treated

this way, their self-esteem and mental health suffer, creating an unsafe study environment for them.

**Marginalization.** hooks has noted that “[w]hatever the emphasis in dominator culture (sexism, racism, homophobia, etc.), until very recently, almost all teachers played a major role in enforcing, promoting and maintaining biases” (2010, p. 31). It is reasonable to assume that international students are often held back due to racial, linguistic and cultural biases. While the financial benefits international students bring is highly valued by host institutions, the welcome that these students receive are not reflective of that value.. As Lee and Rice note, “studying abroad provides great opportunities for personal and professional growth, it also encourages a narrow view of students as economic revenue, which in turn can place less emphasis (and accountability) on their cross-cultural and academic experiences” (2007, p. 384). When discussing how universities should prepare for internationalization, the Organization for Economic Co-operations and Development (OECD) affirms that “[c]ampus and organisation structures should help international students (including students from immigrant families living in the home country) and staff to become well integrated and not marginalised. International students and faculty should feel at home on campus” (Henard et al., 2012, p. 25). Some international students report blatant marginalization and oppression while studying abroad. In Australia for instance, foreign students reported experiencing racial slurs and physical aggression due to their race, as well as segregation during mandated group work during class (Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2009).

Microaggressions are also often felt by international students. Defined as, (1) subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, visual) directed at people of color, often done

automatically or unconsciously; (2) layered insults, based on one's race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname; and (3) cumulative insults that cause unnecessary stress to people of color while privileging Whites (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 161)

This type of marginalization may be more subtle, however, it has a significant impact on international students and leads to unfriendly and oppressive environments (Henry, Rees, & Tator, 2010). For example, international students studying in Australia report being unwilling to approach professors. While instructors orally encourage students to seek help, the former's body language is unwelcoming (Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2009). The same group of students also reported that tutors (or teaching assistants) refused to acknowledge questions posed by Black students, making the alienation apparent to all students within the classroom. Furthermore, this type of marginalization is seen in a study concerning international students in the Atlantic region, as a university recruiter states (emphasis mine), "we know that Canada generally attracts students whose families aren't in the socio-economic status where they **should** be sending their kids abroad" (Chira, 2013, p. 22). It is unlikely that this researcher would make this bold statement while speaking to a student, but as in all cases of institutional racism, this attitude of classism will make itself known through actions, however inadvertent, from its staff and faculty (Henry et al., 2010), furthering disengaging international students.

Also contributing to the marginalization of international students is the fact that universities, overall, are set up to provide success to the privileged. When universities are faced with a student body that does not fit the image of privilege, they often struggle to assist these students in finding success (C. Nel, Troskie-de Bruin, & Bitzer, 2009). In

addition, international students are often marginalized and unwelcomed within the classroom, which reinforces their status as outsiders (hooks, 2010). Another factor that may, in an ironic twist, increase this marginalization, is that international students in Canada generally feel more accepted than in other countries (Madgett & Belanger, 2008). While they feel the effects of marginalization, they may accept it as a normative part of our culture and not protest, as they believe they would be treated with more disrespect in other areas of the world.

Domestic students also sometimes feel that international students are valued by institutions above themselves, mostly due to the financial benefits reaped through international student tuition, leading to divisions amongst the student body. An example of this can be seen in an opinion piece written by a student and published in *The Peak*, the student newspaper of Simon Fraser University. “The institution sees enormous profit in prospective international students, so much so that it carelessly ignores the needs of existing students who deserve to be prioritized” (Van der Zwan, 2014). This notion of pitting domestic versus international students only leads to further ruptures between both populations, and shows that the solution for bringing all students together is not clear.

These acts of marginalization can result in horrible living experiences for international students. In an English study, data showed that racialized attacks on international students ranged from aggressive laughter to physical assault. Students reported being fearful of potential racial aggression, fomenting them to only spend time with people of the same ethnic background and to change their routine and behaviour to protect themselves. However, none of the students reported these attacks to the university or police (L. Brown & Jones, 2013). This forces the consideration that attacks against



international students are often underreported. It is unclear however, whether foreign students are frightened of being further victimized by those in power or if they believe that these aggressions are simply a normative experience. Regardless, this violence leads to what the authors term ‘ghettoisation’ —students who only associate with other students from the same ethnic background (L. Brown & Jones, 2013). Despite the myriad benefits of international students interacting with domestic students, in terms of their own safety (both physically and emotionally), they may have no choice but to self-segregate.

Other studies have found that international students who chose to self-segregate do so because many experienced distress with domestic students and were unsure of their language skills. Due to this, they were extremely likely to choose to mostly interact with people from their own countries (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). Other studies have postulated that due to marginalization, international students may be at a higher risk of abuse (verbal/physical/sexual) both in the university and community (Russell, Rosenthal, & Thomson, 2010). Three murders of international students in Canada have been in the news since 2011; Liu Qian, Jun Lin and Tausif Chowdhury, students at York University, Concordia University, and Carleton University, respectively. This contrasts with research done by Li, DiPetta, and Woloshyn, where Chinese international students identified safety as one of the reasons they chose to study in Canada (2012, p. 157). In interviews with several International Offices in American universities (offices mandated to support international students), every director was aware of cases of domestic violence towards international students at their schools (Johsi, Thomas, & Sorenson, 2013). Brown and Brown (2013) found that all of their international student research participants identified incidents of racism as being deleterious to their national identity. They also

identified issues of institutionalized racism (i.e. people of certain nationalities being forced to register with police, different procedures for different nationalities at the UK border, etc.) as being problematic for their identities. Further, the participants discussed the issues that can occur between international students. For example, Slovenian and Taiwanese students did not want to be identified as Russian or Chinese citizens, respectively. This causes friction between the groups (J. Brown & Brown, 2013). Perhaps, most frightening, was the finding that many international students viewed incidents of racism as normative. In an English study, where one-third of the students interviewed reported incidents of racism, some students stated that racism was a worldwide phenomenon and England was no worse (and even significantly better), than other places. This again indicates that incidents of racism and marginalization may be significantly under-reported (L. Brown & Jones, 2013).

**Differences in educational styles.** International students often report struggling with the differences in education between their home and the country of study, particularly when transitioning from a memorization type model to the critical thinking model preferred by Canadian schools. A study about international students studying at University of British Columbia found that, “[t]hese students were often uncertain about how to structure essays at UBC, how they were expected to behave in class, and how much choice they had over their curriculum and assignments” (Kenyon et al., 2012, p. 10). Students often struggle while adjusting to the holistic method of education preferred in Canadian institutions, particularly when applying skills that our educators have come to consider innate, such as critical thinking and presentation skills. These skills are taught from a young age in Canada leading educators to often assume that everyone has the

ability to achieve success, thus, neglecting to teach these skills to international students within their classrooms. This can also lead to anxiety for international students, as shown by this statement from a UBC student from Hong Kong:

Hong Kong has a so-called spoon-feeding education system, in which students are taught with standardized curriculum. We learn what is required in the exams, no more, no less. In contrast, Canada's education focuses on self-learning and exploration. For instance, during our lectures, the profs would only teach us the main ideas of a topic. We are encouraged to read the textbooks and find out other resources on our own. (Kenyon et al., 2012, p. 10)

Adapting to the active learning environment in Western education can also be challenging for students, since it is far more self-directed than other education styles (Andrade, 2006). Despite this, educators are often not willing to change their teaching styles, since "[e]ven textbooks on intercultural communication, with very few exceptions, still treat Western cultural practices as the communicational norm for intercultural communication across the globe" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 19).

While many Canadians may feel that international students come here because of our superior education system, studies have shown that students are more likely to attend because of difficulties in achieving acceptance at an institution in their home countries (Madgett & Belanger, 2008). This means that these students may not believe in the superiority of the critical thinking education style as Canadians do, and may actually struggle more due to the change in education styles.

**Unclear vision of university life.** Many international students are not aware of the problems they may face once arriving in Canada. Canada is often portrayed as a multicultural utopia with no diversity and acceptance issues (Laughlin, 2014). When international students arrive and experience issues around marginalization, it can be difficult for them to reconcile these attacks with what they perceived about Canada. This could lead to feelings of personal doubt and distress, further fueled by uncertainty as all students, domestic or international, tend to be unprepared for the transition to university (C. Nel et al., 2009). The differences in expectations between secondary and post-secondary schools cause culture shock for all students, which is further exacerbated for international students who are also attempting to integrate into society beyond the ivory towers. The independence of attending university and living without parental supervision can also be problematic, as students struggle to find life/study balance (C. Nel et al., 2009). While the issues of adjustment may be similar for both domestic and international students, having to adapt to a new society and deal with marginalization makes the acclimatization significantly more stressful for international students. Additionally, the need for many international students to work while studying is a contributing factor for stress and academic issues (Andrade, 2006). Most international students do not have experience working part-time and attending school full-time simultaneously, which is a normative experience for many Canadian students. However, this work is often required for international students, whether as a condition of their university program, the need for additional financial support or simply to gain Canadian work experience.

**Poor guidance from universities.** While international students acknowledge receiving some guidance from their institutions, more support is needed. Students

identify the unfamiliarity with university campuses and procedures, such as class registration, textbook purchases, etc., as major stumbling blocks (Andrade, 2006). For example, international students have specifically mentioned that simple services, such as Frequently Asked Questions departmental web pages, could help them in their academic journey (Madgett & Belanger, 2008). Seeking personal help, whether for financial, academic or psychological reasons, can be embarrassing for international students and for this reason they often will not reach out for this help (McLachlan & Justice, 2009). International students often suffer in silence, and presumably, take on the blame for their misunderstandings rather than identifying them as a failure on the university's part, as universities rarely seek out students in need of help. Nonetheless, there is a moral imperative on the university's part (particularly since international students are paying higher tuition fees), to help ensure their success by providing emotional and academic support services, among others. While universities may not be purposely discriminating against students, "pedagogical silence towards diversity can maintain the status quo of whiteness as privileged, invisible and normative" (Kannen & Acker, 2008, p. 37). Trahar (2010) has noted that while universities strive to provide an internationalized education, educators and students struggle with the lack of resources provided. International students have identified that counseling and guidance are crucial to support their growth. However, because of cultural differences, they are often loath to seek out these services (Munoz & Munoz, 2000). International students commonly perceive that people in the new country are too busy to help them cope (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2007). While most students identify professors as an integral part of their ability

to adapt, professors do not necessarily see that they play a role in the internationalization of their institution.

Research university faculty did not consider cultural globalization to be something emerging from their international actions. They intellectually recognize globalization with world citizen consciousness as a phenomenon encountered in their international relationships, but do not see that their actions are building that citizenship consciousness. They do not account for the actions of their academic department in terms of global consciousness or interaction. Rather, they interpret their actions almost entirely in terms of competitive entrepreneurialism – raising the institutional ranking of the department, conducting good research, getting good students, getting more grants (money), etc. (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012, p. 17)

Due to this conflict between the needs of students and the goals of professors, international students are often left to navigate the waters of academia on their own. This has been confirmed by a group of Canadian researchers after interviewing Chinese students studying in Canada. One of the participants stated that “[p]rofessors teaching in this (international education) program may also need to be more student-centered and adopt methods that are more engaging and more convincing” (Li et al., 2012, p. 158).

**Language.** Language is commonly used as an oppressive mechanism. Bourdieu recognized that a person’s use of language determined their future prospects, both economically and socially (Bourdieu, 1977). In order to gain access to the power of ‘Canadianness’ and access the advantages of living in a G8 developed nation, literacy and ability to use English as an academic language is required. Despite the diversity within Canada, English and French language abilities are prized above others, marginalizing the

use of other languages, particularly in schools. This imperialism leads to significant difficulties for students who come into our schools speaking a mother tongue that is not English or French. Their education is compromised, as many teachers do not test the student's knowledge in their native tongue, thus forcing them to flounder in English or French until they build new language skills. This puts their placement within Canadian society at stake since, as Paul noted, "[b]y the nineteenth century, [...] [literacy] was becoming a powerful cultural tool, used to inoculate ideas of national identity" (2011, p. 143). Thus, the inability to access English or French upon arrival stands as a marker that a student is not, in fact, Canadian but other. This paves the road to classroom marginalization. As Bourdieu states, "[l]anguage is not only an instrument of communication or even of knowledge, but it also is an instrument of power. A person speaks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished" (1977, p. 648). What happens therefore, to international students upon arriving in Canada without the language to communicate, and a lack of university accommodation or support to gain it? As hooks notes, "it is not the English language that hurts me, but what the oppressors do with it, how they shape it to become a territory that limits and defines, how they make it a weapon that can shame, humiliate, colonize" (1994, p. 168). In what ways are Ontario universities working to ensure international students are understood, regardless of their fluency? How are the voices of international students silenced because they do not have the aptitude in English to effectively communicate? Educators "must change conventional ways of thinking about language, creating spaces where diverse voices can speak in words other than English or in a broken, vernacular speech" (hooks, 1994, p. 173).

### **Areas for Further Inquiry**

It is acknowledged that international students bring with them significant positive effects for both our institutions and society. Despite this, it seems that universities are not successfully considering how to best accommodate and integrate these students.

It is troubling that many studies consistently identify that international students are unable to connect with domestic students. Few suggestions are made however, as to how to assist with the formation of relationships, especially given that university is also a stressful and busy experience for domestic students. It would be beneficial to examine how international students have developed relationships with domestic students in order to make recommendations to further encourage networking. Additionally, it should be considered why Canadian students, who are presumably raised in a multicultural environment, are reluctant to accept international students into both their academic and social circles.

Keyon et al. (2012) found that international students at the University of British Columbia were viewed as a homogenous group, leading to the disenfranchisement of American students, who occupied a strange liminal space as neither really foreign or domestic students. As such, they did not seek support for international students, feeling it was not intended for them. It may be worth exploring whether providing students with support that is specific to their region (or religion, language or ethnicity) is more effective than the generalized programming offered by most universities.

International students have reported that university assistance is required to find housing. Further research should be dedicated at observing if living on-campus, as opposed to off-campus, may help student success rates.



While much research has been done on international graduate students, there is a paucity of research on lower level (first and second year) undergraduate students, despite the fact that as of 2018, 66% of international students studying in Canada were working on undergraduate degrees (Statistics Canada, 2018). Additionally, literature search on how Ontario universities are serving the international student population did not yield any concrete results. The data collected is likely disparate from research conducted on Atlantic Provinces, which seem to attract a different demographic of students than Ontario universities. This makes it clear that there is a void in the literature for further research in Ontario universities.

I have found that there is a lack of information regarding the effects of stress on international students throughout the literature. While the issues that affect the students are well elucidated, the effects that negative issues have on international students are often ignored. When considered, it is only superficially through listing, with no exploration on the real impact on international students. This lends credence that my research is best suited to a qualitative study, where rich data can be compiled, looking at how these issues affect individuals.

Finally, it may be reasonable to consider how we measure success for international students. Is it an individual measure of their emotional comfort, mental health, academic success, graduation rates or a combination thereof? Only by considering what the success criteria are, can we ensure that universities are meeting them.

Finland has similarly struggled with the oppression that can be perpetuated through the mask of multiculturalism. In a study of a Finnish grade one class, Lappalainen found that “in the case of children with a Finnish background, these kinds of

‘failures’ or problems are conceptualised as individual problems [...] When children with an immigrant background are discussed, the problems are explained away as having their roots in ethnicity.” (2006, p. 104). It has been shown that international graduate students are better able to adjust to university life when involved in an international student society or when supported by their international student peers (Levitz, Noel, & Richter, 1999; Madgett & Belanger, 2008; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; C. Nel et al., 2009). The social support lent by others who are (or have been) in the same situation and can therefore truly empathize with each other helps incoming international students adapt to the university faster, and leads to increased student success. It has also been shown that social support from other sources, whether from parents, peers (domestic or international), university alumni or university staff and faculty, is key to both academic and personal success (C. Nel et al., 2009). What remains to be seen are the ways in which this kind of support can be provided, considering the lack of interaction between domestic and international students, and how institutionalized racism and xenophobia work to make both the institution and Canadian society an unfriendly place for international students.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

Using the conceptual framework of globalization and internationalization within Canadian universities, this research hopes to examine the effects —socially, emotionally, and academically— of studying in Ontario universities. The social and emotional effects of university internationalization were examined on a select group of six international students, who served as participants of the study. The results obtained through this small sample helped me to consider whether international students are being well served during their studies and time in Canada.

Equally important is to consider the marginalization the participants have undergo. Belonging to races, religions, and languages that are often oppressed, these interviews allowed the students voice their thoughts in ways often denied to international students. Li and Tierney postulated that “Chinese, Thai, and Saudi students were more polite toward their professors and education institutions than Canadian students and that their gratitude of having the opportunity to study in the program distorted their responses [...] Only individual in-depth interviews where research participants were honest with an interviewer could find out what they really thought” (2013, p. 10). Meeting with these students in person allowed them to be frank and forthcoming in ways that cannot be achieved through other methods. Looking at the academic success and emotional health of international students within Ontario universities provided insight into how successful Ontario universities are in meeting the diverse learning needs of their international student population.

**Researcher's Location**

I am a white woman. I grew up in an affluent household, where my parents ensured I was afforded every opportunity for success. My childhood was one of privilege, as my adulthood has been. However, I grew up knowing that I was expected to help ensure that equity was enacted in our society. Both of my parents are feminists (although I am not sure that my father would identify himself as such), and I was raised on stories of my feminist grandmother and the ways that she subverted the gender constructs. My parents both deeply believe in equity and raised me with that tenet—despite all inequities and acts of marginalization in this world, all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities.

As a 17-year-old, I had the chance to study abroad for a semester. This seemed a grand adventure, and I jumped at the chance to study in Switzerland. I soon discovered that leaving my family behind, even if only for a few months, was not as easy as I had expected. I spend the first week sobbing from homesickness and refusing to eat. After that week was through, my homesickness abated, and I was able to savour my experience. After graduating with my undergraduate degree, I was offered a position to teach in China for a year. At the age of 22, and unsure of my near future, I was looking forward to spending a year discovering my passion. My first week was, again, filled with tears (that actually started at the security check at Pearson International Airport), but once I was able to adjust to my new surroundings. I soon discovered that, to my surprise, I actually wanted to be a teacher (something that never occurred to me before). Upon my return to Canada, I took a job working at an International School, where I am still employed 18 years later.

My school is remarkably diverse. We have students from approximately 70 different countries from Asia, Africa, North America, the Caribbean, and Europe. My classroom is filled with students of many races, mother tongues, and nationalities. Since my school is also a boarding school, teachers take even more of the parenting role than is typical. As with any school, the teenagers we teach often struggle with mental health issues. When added to the stress generated by culture shock as they moving to a new country with different etiquette rules and customs, our role as teachers becomes even more important since their parents are not close by to help guide their children.

I have always aimed to teach in a way that was equitable and made my students feel like they have an equal place in the classroom, a place where they are valued and their voices heard. But when I look back at the beginning of my career, I realize that I have failed in many ways. I have placed my experiences before those lived by my students, centering my white, euro-centric experiences of the world. I never actively oppressed students but in hindsight, I can see many ways that I perpetuated racism within my own classroom. While I encouraged, supported and cheered my students' successes, in many ways I ignored that the playing field of education was not levelled and that my students were not all starting from the same place. As I started my Master of Education program, the course content enabled me to see how I could become an anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-oppressive teacher. I know that I continue to fail in a multitude of ways, but I am constantly attempting to improve so that I can provide a safe space for my students to learn, where their race, first language, gender, sexuality and any other defining feature of their lives is not used to exclude or oppress them. It is out of this, that this research grows.

The focus for this study was sparked by a visit from a school alumnus, who had graduated and moved onto an Ontario university. At the end of a school day in October, she came back to visit me. This young woman was not only an ideal student, with almost 200 hours in community service and a graduating average of approximately 87%, but also a popular, attractive and well-spoken person. She is also an international student who holds a fair amount of privilege, as she is a white, affluent woman from a European country. Despite this, she came to me in tears on that October afternoon. She reported having no friends. Canadian students in her classes refused to do group work with her, as they assumed her accent meant that her English was not good enough to achieve success. Her professors seemed distant and cold, and she felt alone. She was ready to give up on her Canadian education and return home. Upon questioning, she shared that she had suicidal thoughts. Working with others from the school, we liaised with her university to ensure she would have support and help, and then we worked with her to develop strategies to ensure her success. Fortunately, they were successful and the last I heard, she was excelling in her studies and had found friends to help support her. However, in discussion with other teachers, I discovered that this was not an isolated case. Many teachers reported students —successful, intelligent, and capable young people with the advantage of at least one year of Ontario secondary school curriculum— coming back and sharing similar experiences lived in Ontario universities. That led me to question how Ontario universities were supporting international students. The cost of post-secondary education in Ontario is very high. For example, in the 2017-2018 school year, international undergraduate engineering students approximately paid \$50,780 in tuition (University of Toronto, 2016). Given that international students are clearly necessary for

the financial well-being of our institutions, I wanted to observe how universities would ensure their success, not only academically, but also socially and emotionally.

### **Research Design**

While qualitative research cannot be applied to the population at large, it allows the researcher to form grounded theory, in which evidence gathered can be analyzed for similarities, and then used to guide a theory, or as Neuman states, “[a] grounded theory approach pursues generalization by making comparison across social situations” (2003, p. 52). Through the interviews of six culturally and gender diverse international undergraduate students attending different universities within the province, we may begin to recognize where Ontario’s strengths and weaknesses are as we incorporate internationalization within our institutions. Grounded theory allows researchers to “analyze specific events or settings in order to gain insight into the large dynamics of a society” (Neuman, 2003, p. 52). By applying grounded theory, I will be able to use “micro-level events as the foundation for a more macro-level explanation” (Neuman, 2003, p. 52). In order to be able to use the research as the basis for grounded theory, it must be “precise and rigorous, capable of replication” (Neuman, 2003, p. 52). It is my hope that the participants in this research will indeed provide insight into the specific experiences lived by post-secondary international students in Canada—a group whose voice is often ignored because of their marginalized position within society. This research should give them a voice, allowing their experiences within Canadian universities to be considered. Grounded theory is unique in that its creators, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, were able to develop a research methodology that “offered systematic strategies for qualitative research practice” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 7). However, grounded theory is

also focused on “notions of human agency, emergent processes, social and subjective meanings, problem-solving practices, and the open-ended study of action” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 9). The centering of research on humanity and considering the agency of the research participants are central to my goals. As Okolie has noted, “the results of research should be grounded in reality so that efforts to uplift people, especially people’s struggles to liberate themselves, would be based on reality and, therefore, be more useful” (2005, p. 242). In this vein, I hope that this research will help Ontario universities better assess the support and care they provide for international students. As noted, grounded theory allows this kind of problem-solving to occur.

For my thesis, I used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling can be used, “to select members of a difficult-to-reach, specialized population” (Neuman, 2003, p. 213). Through my position as a teacher at a large, international secondary school, I have access to our former students who are now in university. The school agreed to send out the letter of invitation (



Appendix A) via email to this group, requesting their participation in the research.

While my goal was to utilize random sampling within the respondent population, since only six students agreed to the interview process, random sampling was not used to determine interviewees. Instead, all volunteers became participants.

### **Interview Process**

There are many options available to gather the participants' feedback on their education, including surveys and interviews. At an earlier stage of the present research design, surveys were carefully considered, as they allow the gathering of a significant amount of information in an easy format. However, as Okolie has noted, “[h]ow can those long denied a voice be able to regain their voice if the researcher does not explicitly try to facilitate the process?” (2005, p. 251). In order to do my part in facilitating the process, I rejected the idea of using a survey. The students participating in the research may have cultural taboos against expressing any perceived weakness, or discussing their problems within the Canadian educational system. In a survey, they may not be willing to address these issues. Language skills are often cited in the research as being a stumbling block for international students. A survey does not allow the researcher to clarify any issues or concerns around language and may distort the answers given. The decision to proceed with an interview process, specifically investigative interviewing, is based on the benefits of this research method. This methodology, based in grounded theory, allows “accurate details [...] with the aim of uncovering hidden actions and intentions or exposing policies and practise and their implications” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 57). Interviewers have the opportunity to “try to reduce embarrassment, fear and suspicion so that respondents feel comfortable revealing information” (Neuman, 2003, p. 292). It was

my goal to put students at ease through the interview process while discussing issues that are emotionally difficult, such as oppression, academic difficulties, and mental health. I also sourced a list of counseling services from each university to refer and ensure that research participants had access to emotional support, should they need further help. I acknowledge that this is not an easy process. As Charmaz notes:

The knowledge we take into the field and the knowledge we gain from it typically differ from that of our research participants. We bring analytic skills to our experience and leave with a conceptual rendering of it. Some ethnographers become immersed in worlds that bear little resemblance to those from which they came. Even if they believe that they think, act, and feel like members of their studied worlds, one sharp difference remains: ethnographers know they can leave. (Charmaz, 2014, p. 24)

Given that I am a White, Canadian-born, English speaking researcher, it was essential that I forged relationships with my research participants that allowed them to feel as comfortable as possible. The differences between them and I were evident, since the participants are all from different ethnic backgrounds and most are English Language Learners. This could result in “interactional power differences”, which “represent taken-for-granted hierarchical arrangements that people enact during the interview” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 73). Culturally, the questions I asked may be difficult. As Charmaz notes, “[i]nterview participants sometimes believe that talking about personal matters with strangers is neither polite nor appropriate” (2014, p. 29). Miczo has observed that “[n]egative emotions and negative self-conceptions are disruptive of the smooth flow of interaction; many people in this culture lack the skills and resources for dealing with raw

negative emotions. There is, therefore, pressure toward “glossing over” negative events and experiences, and patients are aware of this pressure” (2003, p. 80). Additionally, interviews ask the participants to turn their “[p]rivate selves (...) into public spectacles” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 81). Rapley notes that feminist research, “sought to ‘unmask’ and then ‘de-centre’ the power balance” (2004, p. 15). My goals echo this, as I attempted to foster a place for students to share their experiences in a way that allowed their voices, which are often marginalized, to be heard. Charmaz suggests that, “[p]roposed interview questions must be sufficiently detailed enough to convince evaluators that no harm will befall research participants yet open enough to allow unanticipated material to merge during the interview” (2014, p. 66). This also allows “revisiting and reframing [of] conceptual categories as [one] conduct[s] interviews” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 108).

Interviewing participants in a space that allows for comfort and disclosure is key (Rapley, 2004, p. 18). To this end, I offered participants the option of having the interview take place in a public place, such as a room in a library, or in a private area, such as an office. The interviews were be taped and transcribed, while participants were provided with a transcript to confirm interpretive adequacy. This aligns with my goals, which position:

Interventive in-depth interviewing as a necessary component of an anti-racism framework. This refers to deep, probing interviews in which the research goes beyond mere collection of facts or stories and narratives. Rather the research, in addition, intervenes in order to get at the subjects’ interpretation of their experiences, tries to interpret those interpretations, puts them in their wide sociohistorical and political context, and feeds them back to the subject as

information arranged and presented in a theoretically framed manner. (Okolie, 2005, p. 242)

Before any research began, the Brock Research Ethics Board provided an ethics clearance, file number 16-099 MOGADIME.

### **Gaining Informed Consent**

The research process first began with a letter of invitation (Appendix G). The international school where I currently teach emailed these letters to former students. The letter clearly outlined the research topic and informed prospective participants of the types of questions asked, as part of the letter stated:

You are invited to participate in a research study on the experiences of international students in Canadian universities. The study is also interested in the ways that the University may have helped you to adjust to your education within Canada, and how the University could have improved their support. In particular, the research is focused on any academic, social and emotional issues you may have gone through. Some of your responses may be due to discrimination you may have experienced.

By stating the proposed research clearly, potential participants who were not comfortable discussing any aspects regarding the topic, were able to ignore the invitation.

The goal was to select participants from the group of volunteers by distributing a short questionnaire (

Appendix B), aimed to gather basic information on the students. I was then planning to sort respondents by categories (such as country of origin) and create smaller groups. From these, I would randomly choose six participants for the study, aiming to choose a diverse selection of participants. However, since only six participants volunteered, the questionnaire (Appendix B) was used at the beginning of the interview to gain demographic information instead. The interview procedure began by welcoming the participant and thanking them for their time. Before commencing the interview, I reviewed the questions with them, and clarified any areas of confusion. Once they confirmed that they were comfortable with the process, we began the interview, with the acknowledgment that they could seek further clarification if needed or choose to end the interview at any time. Upon completing the questioning portion, I reminded participants that they would receive a copy of the transcript and have an opportunity to provide any corrections, if applicable. At the very end, I thanked the interviewee for their involvement once again, and ended the interview process.

The questions devised for the interview were based on findings from previous research, which highlighted areas in which international post-secondary students experienced difficulties during their studies (Appendix E). Since an objective of this research was to give participants an opportunity to discuss their lives, it was important that the first question was of an introspective nature. The question asked: "Could you describe yourself to me? How would you describe your age, race, gender, nationality, sexuality? Is there anything else I should know about you?" The literature review showed that one of the major areas of concern for students was the risk of failure and the shame that comes along with it, leading to the question: "Have you been academically

successful while at university? Are there ways that your university could have helped support you to make you more successful?” Overwhelmingly, international students have reported an inability to form relationships with domestic students. This was examined by the question: “Socially, how has your life outside of school been since coming to Canada? Are you easily able to form connections and friendships? Are there ways that your university could have helped you to be more successful?” Marginalization of international students occurs in a multitude of ways. To survey lived experiences of discrimination within Ontario universities, I asked: “Have you experienced discrimination during your time in university? If yes, could you please describe your experience(s)?” Many international students discuss struggling with the differences in educational styles as they learn. To determine if the differences are significant, I asked: “Can you describe the culture and society you were educated in before coming to study in Canada? How did you learn? How were you taught? Did you enjoy your education?” I followed up with a question inquiring if they are enjoying their education in Canada and the reasons. I also asked probing questions to clarify areas that may be unclear or to discuss areas where students found themselves with conflicted emotions. Finally, many international students report that they do not feel supported by their universities as they complete their studies. To determine if that also applies to international students in Ontario, I asked: “What aspects of your education have you enjoyed while in Canada? Have you felt like a valued member of your classes? Has the university supported you in your education?”

Once the interviews were finished and participants confirmed the interpretive adequacy, the data was coded. Coding allows researchers to “define what is happening in

the data and begin to grapple with what it means” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). Through coding, I was able to “shape the analytic frame from which (I) build the analysis” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). Coding Incident with Incident allowed me to see how standardized the experiences of international students are, and discover common threads amongst their educational experiences. Focused coding then allowed for the “determin[ation of] the adequacy and conceptual strength of [my] initial codes” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 140).

### **Participants**

Students from diverse genders, racial and cultural backgrounds were sought for the present study. To qualify, participants must have come to Canada for the express purpose of studying within an Ontario university. As a teacher at an international secondary school, I was granted access to the email list of former students in order to find participants willing to be part of this study.

A copy of the interview questions (Appendix ) was provided to participants, as part of the process. I asked them to reflect on their experiences within Canadian universities to help them prepare for the interview. While this provided participants with time to develop detailed recollections, it should also have helped students who are English language learners.

For many of the participants, shame could have been a major concern. To reassure that their experiences will not be shared inappropriately, all participants were given pseudonyms to ensure their privacy. I also provided all participants with copies of their transcribed interviews for further review. This allowed the participants to ensure that their words and thoughts were correctly recorded, giving them the chance to correct any errors.

This ultimately allowed for interpretive adequacy, certifying that the data I collected was correct. Since I am a teacher at their former school, it was essential to assure students that their identifying information would not be shared with any previous schools that they have attended.



Table 1

*Demographic Information of Participants*

Pseudonym	Gender	Country of Origin	First Language	Race/Culture	University
Elizaveta	Woman	Russia	Russian	White	University A
Jack	Man	Vietnam	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	University B
Sally	Woman	Malaysia	English	Chinese-Malaysian	University A, secondary campus
Ava	Woman	Indonesia	Indonesian	Indonesian	University A
George	Man	Malaysia	English	Malaysian	University C, Father attended University E
Amelia	Woman	Vietnam	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	University D

### **Individual Participants**

Elizaveta is a student from Russia who identifies as a white heterosexual woman. Russian is her first language. She was 20 years old at the time of the interview. She was in her second year at University A, studying biology. She described herself as open, dedicated, easily inspired, and involved in many extracurricular activities in her university. In Russia, she found her studies to be challenging and tedious, and while she enjoyed them (in retrospect), she was relieved when she made the choice to attend school in Canada. Prior to beginning her university studies, she attended an independent secondary school in Ontario for approximately four years.

Jack is a student from Vietnam who identifies as a Vietnamese man. Vietnamese is his first language. He was 18 years old at the time of the interview. He was in his first year at University B, studying computer science. He described himself as weird. In Vietnam, he did not enjoy his studies. He disliked having no choice in his curriculum and did not fit in at his school. Prior to his university studies, he attended an independent secondary school in Ontario for approximately one and a half years.

Sally is a student from Malaysia who identified as a Chinese-Malaysian woman. English is her first language. She was 19 years old at the time of the interview. She was in her second year at a secondary campus of University A, studying Geographic Information Systems. In Malaysia, she did not enjoy her studies, mostly due to the fact that the educational system was based on memorization, which did not allow her to apply and enjoy the knowledge she was gaining. Prior to her university studies, she attended an independent secondary school in Ontario for approximately six months.

Ava is a student from Indonesia who identified as an Indonesian woman. Indonesian is her first language. She was 20 years old at the time of the interview. She was in her fourth year at University A, studying actuarial science. She enjoys baking in her spare time. In Indonesia, she attended a school teaching the British curriculum and feels that her education was quite similar to her Canadian education. Prior to her university studies, she attended an independent secondary school in Ontario for approximately one year.

George is a student from Malaysia who identified as a Malaysian heterosexual man. English is his first language. He was 20 years old at the time of the interview. He was in his third year at University C, studying mechanical engineering. He found his education in Malaysia to be boring and that he lacked the motivation to study. The education style in his classes included a hybrid based on both memorization and critical thinking styles. He also felt that he had little connections to teachers. Prior to his university studies, he attended an independent secondary school in Ontario for approximately six months.

Amelia is a student from Vietnam who identified as a Vietnamese woman. Vietnamese is her first language. She was 18 years old at the time of the interview. She was in her first year at University D, studying psychology. She found her studies in Vietnam to be similar to Canadian education in terms of teaching methodology, but it was based on memorization rather than critical thinking. She did not enjoy her studies there, both due to the fact that she was required to study subjects she was not interested in and because she felt she did not retain information under that education style. Prior to her

university studies, she attended an independent secondary school in Ontario for approximately 1 year.

### **Analysis of Data**

Grounded theory requires that overall trends within the data collected are examined to develop an overall picture of the situation. Once the interview transcripts were confirmed and corrected for interpretive adequacy by the participants, the data was analyzed for commonalities. Reoccurring themes were coded and then grouped. Participants were also grouped by common factors, such as region of origin, race, identified gender, years spent in Canada, and any other demographic information that arose during the interview process. Upon completing this portion, the major themes were analyzed. In grounded theory, “the explanation is ‘grounded’ in the data from the participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 61). As suspected, the codes included topics such as discrimination and marginalization, academic difficulties, and recommendations for universities to ensure international students’ success.

### **Challenges in Research**

In order to select the study’s participants, I determined to invite former students from my school, since it was possible for me to contact them and I believed that they would provide honest responses regarding their experiences. My intention was to represent different universities in Ontario, to observe whether issues are provincial or specific to particular institutions. I also intended to choose a diverse group of students to see if their experiences differ based on aspects such as race, gender, mother tongue language, etc.

However, selecting participants in this manner could also have affected my research. There can be no doubt that there is a power imbalance between teacher and student. While I now hold no power over these students, I was either their teacher or was a senior teacher at their school. Furthermore, I am a teacher that does not have friendships with students, even after they have left the school. The fact that I have always been cautious to keep my relationships with students strictly on a professional level means that the participants interviewed may have felt intimidated, and could have attempted to tamper their thoughts by relaying a positive experience. During interviews, I had to be sure that my questions, tone and body language encouraged truth. I asked follow up and probing questions if necessary, which helped to establish reliability (Best & Kahn, 2002, p. 235). Naturally, I could have entered the interview with preconceived notions of the participants since I may have personally known the students, which was another risk. While the objective of grounded theory is to develop theory, “based on concepts that are generated directly from the data that are collected in one or more research studies” (B. Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 381), it was essential to put aside any personal biases during the interviews and acknowledge that the participants’ lives likely changed since graduating.

It was also necessary that I recognize my own privilege while interviewing these students. As Best and Kahn note, “[t]o establish sufficient rapport, however, it may be necessary to consider the gender, race and possibly other characteristics of the interview in relation to the interviewee. For instance, [...] an African American should interview other African Americans regarding instances of discrimination that they have experienced” (2002, p. 323). While I have been an international student, a teacher and a

stranger trying to integrate into a foreign culture with a different language, my race has protected me from most discrimination. While I can empathize with the struggles that international students face, I simply have not experienced the oppression that many have —my participants were aware of this. However, I worked to establish rapport with my participants, which helped to ensure that the answers given by the participants were accurate impressions of their university lives (Best & Kahn, 2002, p. 324).

## CHAPTER FOUR: STUDY RESULTS

This chapter will discuss the themes that emerged through the interviews stage. In-depth personal interviews allowed the subjects to have time to answer the questions in a substantive way, and also to seek clarification when needed. Overall, participants were excited to be part of the research and seemed to be forthcoming in describing their experiences as an international student in Ontario. Once all interviews had been completed and the transcripts approved, the data was coded, allowing for themes to emerge. Attribute coding allows for “essential information about the data and demographic characteristics of the participants” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 69). Initial coding was then used to identify major categories, and subcoding utilized to explore themes in greater focus. These categories and themes can be found in Table 2. However, it is important to note that these themes were often interconnected. For example, it is difficult to discuss social connections with domestic students without acknowledging how language barriers affect these relationships. The first category of themes looks at the student impetus for attending university in Canada, which also helps to underline their expectations for university life in Ontario. The second category considers how the costs of education in Ontario affects their studies. The third category examines discrimination during their time in Ontario, including any participation in internships and co-op positions required by their programs. The fourth category analyzes the support offered by universities to international students, both in terms of adequacy and services used by international students. The rest of the chapter will explore each of the themes in detail by examining the individual experiences of the students. The participants have been assigned pseudonyms and universities have been labeled as A, B, C, etc., to ensure the

respondent's privacy. These pseudonyms, along with basic demographic information, are available in Table 1. I feel it is important to note that the pseudonyms given reflect the cultural/ethnic heritage of names used by the participants themselves when they introduced themselves, with the exception being Jack, who chose his own pseudonym. In other words, if participants used a preferred name that was from their own culture/heritage, or if they used their own name with no preferred name, I chose a pseudonym from that culture/heritage. If they used a 'Western' name, I chose a pseudonym that is traditionally associated with those cultures. The participants are listed in the order the interviews occurred. False starts such as 'I mean', among others, have been removed, because they "told the reader nothing except that the speaker was taking some time to think or needed to practise what they wanted to say" (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006, p. 18).



Table 2

*Description of Categories and Themes*

Category	Theme
Reasons for attending university in Canada	Cost of education
	Increased opportunity
	Family pressure
	Access to education
	Lack of comfort in home country
Cost of Education	Canada as compared to other countries
	Lack of scholarships & financial aid
	Disparity between domestic student tuition & international student tuition
Social connections	Language barriers
	Interactions between domestic and international students
	International student 'cliques'
Discrimination in Ontario	Internships & Co-op positions for international students
University support for international students	Inappropriate programs
	Lack of use by international students

### **Reasons for Attending University in Canada**

There are many options for international post-secondary education, and several countries, such as the United States of America, Australia, and England, offer educational opportunities that are similar to Canada. When asked their reasons for choosing a Canadian institution, the international perception of Canadian multiculturalism was a drawing point. As Ava noted, “[t]he stereotype is that Canadians are less racist.” However, other factors were significantly more important. Participants also identified cost (discussed as a separate theme), opportunity, family pressure and the access to university education within Canada as other important factors.

### **Increased opportunity**

Career opportunities were identified as a factor in choosing Canada as well. Ava said, “I wanted to go into actuarial science and the financial industry here is huge in Canada, and Manulife, the headquarters are in Toronto. A lot of huge insurance companies are Canadian.” This, however, juxtaposes with the fact that participants also highlighted challenges when looking for internships and co-op positions in the Canadian workforce, reducing their chance of successfully finding employment after graduation. George also felt that his Canadian education would open more doors for him when saying, “I feel like there is a lot more opportunities here. The university provides that.” Jack agreed by stating, “I’ve got so many avenues I can go to, I’m not sure which one to choose from.”

### **Parental/Family Choice**

Parental guidance played a significant role in determining where international students chose to attend university. Elizaveta shared that coming to Canada “was initially my mother’s idea.” George spoke to the fact that his father made the decision for him:

It’s my dad, basically, it was his choice. He came to Canada 34 years ago —he’s old— he studied 2 years in (University A) before transferring to (University E), he did math and he enjoyed the course, he really enjoyed his university life, basically, both in the way it was taught and also just the culture. He didn’t have the chance to settle down here, so he went back, had a family, he got me and I guess he’s trying to live through me, in a sense, and he just said, he made all these detailed plans and a couple months before you know, it was actually decided, he was like, ‘Are you cool with this?’, and I’m like, ‘Yeah sure, let’s do it!’

George also spoke to the experiences of other international students, “I feel a lot of international students who come here are not coming here by choice. I feel there’s a lot of pressure from the families to do so and I want to say 50% of my international friends do plan to go back to their home country once they’re done”. Jack echoed the importance of his parents’ role in helping decide his academic future when reporting, “[s]o, my parents decided I needed a change of location, and after a few months of popping back between either America, Canada or Singapore and many other counties, we decided on Canada.” Sally identified the indirect role her parents played by saying, “I chose to come to Canada mostly because my parents actually applied for citizenship here, like almost 10 years ago, but because of, I think the system was down, so they got a refund and they didn’t try applying again. So they already liked this country”.

Sally also cited her family as a reason for attending university in Canada, but for a slightly different reason, saying, “I (want to) apply for a job here and eventually get my PR (permanent resident) which will make it easier for my sister, who wants to come here too, and maybe my parents can retire here if they want to.”

### **Access to Education**

Some participants noted that the opportunity to attend university would likely not have been an option for them in their home countries. Amelia noted that “In Vietnam, it’s quite hard to go to university because grade 12 you have to study a lot and there’s a chance you might fail, so I don’t want to take that risk.” Jack expressed similar concerns when saying, “I was fretting high school in Vietnam. I was failing it. Academically, I was not good.” However, both had the opportunity to enroll in a university in Canada after attending an independent Canadian secondary school for a year.

### **Desire to Leave Home Country**

Participants reported choosing to come to Canada because they were not comfortable in their home countries. George said, “I’m a person who likes adventure and I didn’t like Malaysia a lot, and it was like one of the further countries from Malaysia.” Jack went even further by stating, “[a]cademically, I was not good. Socially, I was worse. So the thing is the country was not fit for me. Even though I’d grown up there, I hated it all the time.” Sally also expressed her desire to leave her home country when declaring that “[t]he biggest goal in my life was to get out of Malaysia. It’s because I want to have more opportunities, so getting out of the country, I just want to see places, and there are more things to do outside of that country.” For many participants, the desire to study in Canada was based on the individual freedoms Canadian societies provide.

### **Cost of Education**

The participants recognized that the cost of education in Canada was also a major factor that encouraged international students to attend Canadian post-secondary institutions. As Sally noted, “compared to the US or England, the exchange rate is lower so it’s easier for us.” Jack expressed a similar sentiment as he chose Canada instead of Singapore because “Singapore is too expensive.” Despite this aura of affordability, many participants noted that the cost of education in Ontario for international students is a significant issue for them. The increase of tuition costs was a concern. Ava noted, “[a]nd especially (University A) increases price every year. When I came in, it was \$38,000 per year, but now it’s like \$40,000 or even beyond \$50,000, it’s been only 3 years, but it’s like that.” Participants also expressed concern about the effect on their parents as with Elizaveta said, “\$45,000 is a big financial struggle.” While I did not specifically ask how this affects the mental health of international students, there can be little doubt that this financial cost is a contributing factor to stress. Since students are mostly relying on parents to pay their tuition, the pressure avoid failure is not only an academic matter, but also a financial one.

Another concern was the disparity between domestic student tuition. Ava noted that the tuition costs are constantly increasing, “I don’t think the price difference in the tuition should be there, or it shouldn’t be too much.” The lack of financial assistance for international students was also an area of concern. As Elizaveta described:

I also got a scholarship my first year through my (Canadian) high school’s partnership with the university, which was a big one for \$8,000. Then I got another scholarship from my college which was small but so cute for a bit over

\$700. I was surprised because it was one that I couldn't apply for and there aren't a lot of things available for international students to apply specifically to. That's another thing, I wish that was more out there because \$45,000 is a big financial struggle.

The cost difference between domestic and international student tuition was presented by Ava as an example of discrimination:

[We have] [e]ven less access compared to domestic students, in terms of scholarships, for example the companies, have the scholarships from companies, they always say we prefer domestic students and internships too, we prefer domestic or PR, students like that. So, I don't think that the price difference should be there.

Elizaveta suggested the fact that increased tuition costs led to social barriers between domestic and international students by asserting that:

[Domestic students] don't have a good attitude towards international students because they imagine that the international students are represented by the rich people who come and have all expensive cars and a lot of Canadians want the higher tuition for international students because they imagine that would mean lower tuition for domestic students, but I don't support this kind of discrimination concerning education, because it is education.

Overall, there was the sense among participants that the additional cost for international students to attend university in Canada was not fair.

## Social Connections

In this section, I will discuss the experiences participants had when connecting with other students, both domestic and international. Within this category, the themes that emerged from the interviews were: language barriers, interactions between domestic and international students, and the formation of international student ‘cliques’.

**Language barriers.** While all participants attended at least two semesters of secondary school in Ontario and completed their studies in English, only two of them were native speakers of English. None of them identified language barriers as an issue during their studies. Interestingly however, George, a native speaker, discussed the effect of cultural differences in language by saying:

Sometimes I get these international student moments when I’m speaking to my friend and I say this phrase or this slang which I thought everyone would know and I realize, ‘Oh wait! It’s only in Malaysia’. Or they would say something and I just wouldn’t understand, it’s just not something I grew up saying. So, it happens rarely, but there is that small reminder of disconnect.

George’s statement is thoughtful as it points out that language is not only grammar and vocabulary, but also culturally based.

Despite feeling as if they had not experienced language blocks, all participants did identify language as being a barrier for other international students. Elizaveta noted, “[t]hankfully English isn’t a barrier for me. [...] [T]wo of my current roommates are actually international students too, and they’ve known each other before and they speak a different language from all of us, so that makes it hard for us to bond because they exclude themselves.” Ava echoed this feeling when stating:

I think I understand their heart too, right? Because they don't speak English that well and they are more comfortable with their mother tongue? It's kinda weird because I sat beside this girl and she was so quiet and always on her headphones and suddenly her Chinese friend came and she took it off and then talked and [was] friendly. But I guess it's natural.

Both participants noted that language had an isolating effect on international students, leading them to spend more time with people who they could communicate with.

**Interactions between domestic and international students.** Almost all participants indicated that they did not struggle when connecting with domestic students. Elizaveta said:

I would say yes, connections come easy, it just takes any conversation topic and thankfully English isn't a barrier for me. I have never been treated any different from any student because this university is such a vibrant place, it's full of international students so there is no prejudice. In terms of friendships, I build friendships based on recurring conversation, so it's mainly my roommates. I actually have some really good friendships with last year's roommates.

Sally noted that the diversity within Ontario meant that she felt integrated into her campus, "[it] actually feels like home, because you don't feel like you're in a foreign country because everyone is foreign, mostly, and people accept you." Jack also discussed the ease with which he found domestic friends:

You see, before university, most of my friends were international students. Even though I lived in [a Canadian city], I didn't really talk to the natives a lot. But



now, here, international students are the minority of my friends here. Most of my friends are second-generation, third-generation, or just live here all of their life.

George described a similar scenario by affirming, “[w]hen I came to [University C], I explicitly told myself, ‘No more. I want to make friends who are Canadian or who have different values or different cultures’.” However, he acknowledged that:

It is difficult to get out and socialize and make friends, and I think I was just really lucky and met the right people at the right time [...] I don’t see myself as an international student, which I think it’s great, because it’s that sort of environment that I’ve put myself into, the social group which doesn’t make me constantly think, or remind myself that I’m an international student.

Sally was the only participant to discuss in-class interactions by saying, “when we work together, when you put students together, although in the beginning, it’s like, everyone’s awkward, but afterwards, everyone works out together and we get the job done, and it helps to work together.”

Both George and Jack specifically spoke to fitting in within Canadian society. Jack said, “[h]ere? It’s like there’s people who follow the rules, there’s people who don’t, there’s people who bend the rules, there are people who use it. It’s a mess of cultures, norms and I love it”, while George stated:

[T]he people are really open and really nice. I have met amazing people which have definitely become lifelong friends and they have become my main support group throughout university. I feel like I wouldn’t be able to meet such like-minded individuals anywhere else.

This statement suggests that for some international students, building relationships in Canada may be easier than in their home countries.

Amelia, who struggled the most with English language within the participants noted that “[i]t’s not as good as at (Canadian high school) because you don’t make friends too much in university, and you don’t have time to hang out like you do in high school.” Sally also described similar problems by saying, “we need to socialize more in order to fit in, although, in first year, that was kinda tough because you get intimidated by all the foreign people.” Although participants did not discuss any specific issues while building relationships, these statements imply that for some international students, the fear of rejection leads to a lack of connections.

Ava noted that she had problems making friends from other races, saying that her friends were “Asian and [...] Canadian-born-Chinese.” She elaborated, “I think for me, it’s very difficult to find Caucasian friends because I think there is something beyond English ability. It might also be because of my program because actuarial science is stereotypically Chinese,” however, she later said that the friends she had made outside of her program were of Asian descent as well. Regardless, she did not feel that this was due to discrimination by white students.

While Jack reported no problems socializing with domestic students, he talked about the cultural pitfalls that international students sometimes meet when attempting to find friends:

You can’t force yourself to be social. It just comes with time. But a lot of people at first, a lot of international students force themselves to be like that. And they

end up always crashing hard, and that's why a lot of people who want to move from like the anti-social extreme to the social one, they always just come back to the other one because they failed hard. They need mentors, just people who can tell them that they're messing up. Because people here are very nice. They don't outright say, 'Guy, you're creepy.'

**International student 'cliques'.** Almost all participants addressed the fact that international students tend to form cliques with others who are from their home culture or speak their own language. As Jack notes:

Usually, they go to their group of nationality, they stick to their nationality. It was always like that at [Canadian secondary school]. For me, I branch out to everybody, whether they be Arabic, Chinese, Hong Kong, Taiwanese, or whatever. I branch out to everybody. And the thing is, I don't know how to fix it, but I want to fix it. I want international students to stop sticking to their own group. I don't know how to do that. I want to stop, I want to stop them from doing that, to just have them branch out, but I don't know how to.

George also expressed a similar sentiment:

I feel that it's very easy for, say for example, I have friends from [Canadian secondary school] who are Malaysian and they stayed with the Malaysian clique and when they came to [University C], they remained with the Malaysian clique and they just found other Malaysians who didn't go to [Canadian secondary school] but are Malaysian and are studying at [University C] and hang out with them the majority of the time.

Only Elizaveta identified this grouping to be a consequence of language barriers, “[i]f the person is feeling self-conscious, that’s a little bit troublesome, and I see self-conscious people gravitating towards their own culture more often.” This also mirrors Ava’s concerns about University A’s distinction between international and domestic students when she states:

I think that sometimes differentiating international student and domestic student... Like, I know they want to help, but that distinction themselves from them makes us feel like a guest [...] But I know that they wanted to help us, but...

This suggests that the universities’ attempts to support domestic and international students separately, can lead to less interaction between the two groups.

**Discrimination in Ontario.** It is evident from the literature that the normative experience of international students includes facing discrimination, often in the form of language or racial bias. However, when participants were asked about issues of discrimination or racism, most could not describe any personal incidents, but did report cases of institutional oppression. On the one hand, Sally addressed classroom inclusion by instructors by stating, “I would say that the professors treat everyone the same, so there is no favouritism here.” On the other hand, Jack, who did not wish to describe the details of incidents and excused the discrimination as not being based on race or culture, stated:

The problem with that is that sometimes people are very toxic. Even in my program, people are very smart in my program. The people in my program, most of them, including me, are nerds. We love what we do. But the thing is, some

people become very, the nicest way I can say it is inner focus. They focus on themselves. They become very toxic. And sometimes, whenever they have the opportunity to bash someone else, whatever, regardless of the reason, they take it. It's not that I'm Asian is the actual reason, it's just an excuse. Other than that, like if somehow, another guy, a White or Black guy, just do the same thing I do, they would still bash them because of it.

Elizaveta, who is white, shared her concerns about being treated differently because she is white, “[b]ut in leadership training, I’ve heard things like our student governing body is too white, and I was the only white person at the table, at all, so that was a little bit weird to me.” However, multiple participants shared concerns about systematic oppression, such as the difficulties for international students to obtain internships and co-op positions.

**Internships and Co-op Positions for International Students.** It is challenging for international students to secure internships or co-op positions in Ontario. Below, Elizaveta described her surprise:

I found out that Russian students cannot do an internship in Canada if it's not an essential part of their degree, so if it's not required for graduation, they are not really allowed to do that, so they have to apply overseas and overseas, it's going to be more competitive and more expensive for a person to move to a new place, so something like that came as a surprise to me. I started realizing I'm not a domestic student.

Ava claimed the reason she was unable to find an internship was due to her status as an international student. She noted that in her search, she was told, “companies, they always say we prefer domestic students and internships too, we prefer domestic or PR (permanent residents), students like that.” None of the students identified university support in bypassing these barriers.

### **University Support**

University support is key to ensure that international students are able to succeed in navigating both the academic and social areas of post-secondary education. The themes discussed by participants were ineffective programs offered by universities, and the lack of use by international students.

When asked about university support for international students, participants were able to list many programs available. Sally, for example, stated that “[t]here are always emails trying to help students out or telling us about events there are that we can take part in.” Many participants however, questioned the effectiveness of these programs. As Jack affirmed, “[t]hey try to do it, [but] they don’t do it well.” As shown below, Ava questioned the value of supporting international students differently from domestic students:

I wouldn’t blame (the university) for them not being successful, but I think that sometimes differentiating international student and domestic student... Like, I know they want to help, but (distinguishing between the two groups) that makes us feel like a guest, like that kind of thing? But I know that they wanted to help us, but... for example in my college, they have, the principal invites some students for dinner, like they’re first-year students, second year. And there is a

special dinner for international students, but I don't think that's necessary, because why do you always separate international students?

### **Ineffective Programs**

While many universities in Ontario have diverse international student populations, Jack felt that the lack of diversity at University B played a role in the absence of support that could specifically assist him:

This school doesn't have a lot of international students. Like it doesn't, like. Specifically, it has a lot of international students from middle Asia. Middle-eastern, Arabic, but not really the south Asian or south-east Asian. So sometimes when I have questions or I need help, I don't really get that.

He was also concerned that the focus was often on simply completing tasks for international students, rather than helping them learn the skills they needed. He identified the need, yet again, for international students to be viewed as a diverse group:

I know that in university, I have to do taxes now. I've been trying to find people who can teach me how to do taxes on my own because I don't want to have to hire someone to do it. I want to do it on my own, save a lot of money. But the thing is, every time I ask the international advisor, they always say, 'Oh, we have students to do it for you so you don't have to worry about it.' Or maybe I have a question about how I get a PR (Permanent Resident) card or how do I get a work permit after this. Yeah... It's like it's kinda hard to find a session, find people who can help me out with that because most people here are from, most international students here aren't south Asian or south-east Asian at all.

### **Lack of Use by International Students**

Many of the participants admitted that there are significant support resources available. However, these require international students to seek them out in first place.

Elizaveta stated the following:

The key here is to look for support. If one needs support, it is there. I know there are registrars. I don't have personal experience, but my friends have positive experiences with registrars' offices and with office hours and professors, different program coordinators are always there, one can go and talk to them. I've emailed professors and scheduled meetings with them, not concerning a specific course, but just exploring academic horizons and it's really helpful. [...] So, I would say support is there and if there is some trouble, I would imagine the university would reach out to especially troubled people, but I can't say for sure.

Ava supported this by stating that for "first year students, the help is there but they just don't know how to use it, I think." She also repeated that support is accessible, but only for those who look for it. Sally concurred by affirming that "[y]ou have to put yourself out there to meet people. The university has pub nights, events and everything, but if you don't go to those, then you're not helping yourself." George, who is a mentor for first-year students, agreed when suggesting that, "I feel, to an extent, it's on the students to actually take the initiative. I feel there are enough resources available, in first year specifically." Interestingly, George identified fear as one reason he chose not to access the programs offered by the university:

They have not directly supported me in the sense of held my hand, but, especially in first year, I'm talking a lot in the context of first year, they had a lot of



resources which were available to me, which I just didn't utilize. So, to an extent again, the university has supported me by providing all these resources, I just didn't really use them. I had a pretty bad time in first year, in terms of just finding my identity and figuring out what I want to do, and that huge switch, suddenly feeling a lot more dumb, a small identity crisis, basically. And I was scared, and I think that was one of the biggest reasons why I didn't utilize those resources. My marks were OK, nothing like major, I didn't have any emotional breakdowns, there were no red flags, so in that sense, I was just a number and they were directing the focus to people who needed the help, who actually came and asked for help, and I didn't do that.

As shown below, Amelia identified feeling like an outsider as a reason for not seeking help:

I kinda feel like everyone knows much more than I am, like, they are more familiar with the university. I got lost for one month before I could find a class. They know how to find the resource(s) on campus, the things that I can never get into.

Overall, the participants felt that the universities did offer support, but that, for several reasons, international students were not willing or able to access that support. When discussing areas for support improvements, most participants felt that the universities were performing adequately when helping their international students and were reluctant to make suggestions. However, further questioning did provide some areas for discussion. Amelia felt that the university placed the responsibility to seek

support on international students themselves, rather than offering it in an accessible way. While she did not make the connection, she reinforced this by stating that “I haven’t found out, but I think that they have the websites so we can go and search for what we want.” Elizaveta seemed to echo this when she said, “I didn’t go out a lot because I live in residence and I got involved with things, but through mentorship programs there are different cafes. It just takes going out and to find the right person.” This implies that the impetus is on the international student to find the right mentor. George was also showed concern of the toll these intense programs can have on students’ mental health:

The thing is I don’t know what they can honestly do, because this is how it is and it will take a toll on people no matter what, and people are choosing to come here, knowing, or should know, that this is going to happen to them. I feel like university needs to find ways to address that, and they are taking steps, but it’s not fast enough.

After analyzing the interviews, it is apparent that the participants are enjoying their post-secondary education in Canada and feel that they have integrated into their university community, overall. Chapter five will analyze their experiences, linking them to the existing literature on international students.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

I came to this research with the desire to ensure that the voices of international students attending Ontario post-secondary institutions were heard. As a teacher in an international secondary school, I was dismayed by the negative experiences reported by former students, who expressed feeling ignored, marginalized and excluded at Ontario institutions. Because of this, I felt it was important to foster a space where international students were able to share their experiences in Ontario universities, discussing both positive and negative aspects of their education. In order to accomplish this, I interviewed six international students currently attending universities in Ontario. The data compiled from the interviews did not fully reflect what was found in the literature review, showing instead that international students are pleased with the education and campus life provided in Ontario.

In chapter one, my goal was to highlight the importance of reviewing the placement of international students in Ontario post-secondary institutions, and discuss the value that international students bring to our country. I also evaluated the scope and limitations of the study. In chapter two, the literature review observed the effects of the internationalization of education, including positive and negative consequences, as well as detecting areas for further inquiry. In chapter three, the methodology for the research was outlined and grounded theory applied, since it is a natural choice due to its ability to centre the voice of the subject. The research processes were also explained, culminating in in-person interviews. In chapter four, the data was presented and analyzed. From the results, the themes identified as being the main reasons for attending post-secondary education in Canada were: tuition costs; social connections; discrimination in Ontario;

university support of international students; and areas in which universities could improve support (both academically and socially). In the rest of this chapter, I will first discuss the results of my findings and then examine the implications for practice. Finally, I will look at areas for future research.

## **Discussion**

The goal of this research was to hear the voices and experiences of international students in Ontario universities. In chapter four, the major categories that emerged from the analysis were outlined. I will discuss each category and the underlying themes following the tone set in the chapter. The first category shows the reasons why participants chose to attend university in Canada. The themes identified were: increased opportunity; family pressure; access to education; lack of comfort in their home country; and cost of education (which will be discussed within its own category). The latter theme was also distinguished as a category and includes the following themes: Canada as compared to other countries; lack of scholarships and financial aid; and disparity between domestic and international student tuitions. The following category recognized was social connections. Within this classification, I will discuss the themes of language barriers, interactions between domestic and international students, and the formation of international student cliques. The category of discrimination in Ontario will address the theme of internships and co-op positions for international students. The last category, university support for international student, will outline the themes of: ineffective programs and lack of use by international students. Finally, the areas in which universities could improve support will be discussed.

## Reasons for Attending University in Canada

**Increased opportunity.** One reason participants chose to study in Canada was to increase careers opportunities upon graduating. In Ava's case, her choice was due to the number of Canadian companies in her field of study. This complements Bodycott's study on Chinese international students, where he reports that "[p]arents and students both rated opportunities of employment following graduation as an important push factor" (2009), and Griner and Sobol's suggestions that "future career is an influential factor for Chinese student interest in studying abroad" (2016, p. 6). For George and Jack, the choice was not necessarily due to employment in Canada upon graduation, but the worldwide value of a Canadian degree. A 2018 survey of international students in Canada found that "[s]tudents choose their study destination based on a variety of factors including [...] the international prestige of a qualification from a particular country/institution" (*The Student's Voice: National results from the 2018 CBIE International Student Survey*, 2018, p. 5). As shown below, this has been echoed by research finding that students wish to study in Canada and the USA:

The discourse of the American Dream, or the Canadian Dream, within immigrant populations is principally associated with the idea of opportunities. Both Canada and the United States are believed to hold opportunities for those willing to work to achieve their goals. This system in both countries is perceived as based on meritocracy. (J. Chen, 2017, p. 126)

However, it is important to note that the opportunities for employment upon graduation may not be as abundant as expected. In their study of Canadian international students, Nunes and Arthur found that half of the participants were unable to find work in

Canada and, “[t]hose whose expectations were unmet stated that jobs related to their major were scarce, there was a greater chance of promotion at home, their perception of opportunities had changed, or there was currently an economic recession” (2013, p. 38). Due to this, it has been suggested that “mentoring and preceptorships likely improve connection with possible local employment opportunities” (K. Williams, Williams, Arbuckle, Walton-Roberts, & Hennebry, 2012, p. 39). In fact, a case study about college-trained nurses in Ontario reported that “the majority of graduates found employment relatively close to their training institution, suggesting that the role colleges play in directing international students into their local labour markets is important to examine” (K. Williams et al., 2012, p. 39). Staff working with international students in Ontario universities have identified career counselling as an area that requires additional support, since “[s]ome respondents suggested that more could be done to tailor career counselling to IS’ (international students’) specific needs, including offering them more experiential learning, practical opportunities, and orienting them towards cultural differences between IS and Canadian employers” (El Masri, Choubak, & Litchmore, 2015, p. 24).

**Parental/family choice.** Most participants indicated that family played a significant role in their decision to attend university in Canada —mostly through explicit choice by parents. While George and Elizaveta indicated the choice to study in Canada was made by their parents and then agreed upon by themselves, Jack’s parents decided he should study abroad without selecting the country and the final decision of Canada was made by the family as a whole. Sally chose a country to which her parents had previously applied to immigrate and noted that one of her goals, was to obtain her permanent residency to encourage her sister to also study in Canada. Mazzarol and Soutor similarly

found that “[p]arental influence is particularly strong among undergraduate students when they are choosing a destination country” (2002, pp. 88–89). There is no doubt that this increases the pressure on international students to succeed, as Hanassab & Tidwell have said, , “[b]ecause education is a valued commodity in the home countries, most international students commonly experience strong, if not severe, academic pressures” (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002, p. 316). However, this pressure did not arise as a theme in the literature review. Hu and Hagedorn found that a primary motivating factor why Chinese parents send their children to the United States to study abroad was, that “they considered the international acceptability and recognition of American higher education as a tremendous benefit of their long-term investment” (2014, p. 39). According to research, international students’ recognize that “[a]cademic responsibility is expected to be the foremost,” mainly due to “the awareness of ensuring return on investment, and more internally determined motivations such as their self-esteem and identity, perceived work ethic” (Thi Tran & Thi Phuong Vu, 2016, p. 11). When this perceived filial duty to succeed academically is combined with the financial costs of education, which often lies solely on parents, there is immense pressure to ensure academic achievement while in university. There is little that post-secondary institutions can do to relieve this pressure, particularly given their reliance on international student tuition to ensuring adequate operational funding. However, making academic support accessible to international students to ensure academic success, could be key to helping ensure stronger mental health of international students.

**Access to education.** Both Amelia and Jack noted that part of their motivation for attending university in Canada was to help assure a spot at a university. For many

international students, the entrance exams required in their home countries are a significant barrier to post-secondary education, one which is not present in the Ontario landscape. Mazzerol and Soutar found that a major factor in the students' decision to study abroad was due to the difficulty of enrolling at universities in their home countries (2002). As Chen describes, he found similar pressures on Chinese international students, "[t]he participants in this study unanimously expressed concern about the university entrance exam, which constitutes a major push factor recognized by both students and their parents" (2017, p. 125). The Ontario system of deciding university entrance based on the equivalent of 6 grade 12 courses offers international students the chance to have the admission to their future studies decided in a more holistic and conceivably juster way, providing a draw for international students.

**Desire to leave home country.** The wish to leave their home country and venture out to a new land arose as a theme among participants, but the motivations varied. Among many reasons, Jack was emphatic about his inability to fit in Vietnam as he considers himself to be weird, driving him to choose the option of leaving the country. He believed that the diversity in Canada allows him to better integrate by stating that "[i]t's like there's people who follow the rules, there's people who don't, there's people who bend the rules, there are people who use it. It's a mess of cultures, norms and I love it." For George and Sally, their choice to come to Canada was based more on the desire to leave their home country, explore new horizons and increase their opportunities. As seen in other studies, international students have been "pushed by a desire for a higher quality education and one which would provide international/intercultural experience" (Bodycott, 2009, p. 363). Universities in Ontario could differentiate themselves by



offering unique Ontario experiences —ones that international students are unlikely to gain in their home countries. This could range from camping trips to visiting Six Nations of the Grand River, or the CN Tower, among many other attractions. While certainly many universities do offer trips for the international student body, continuing to recognize that international students desire experiences beyond the confines of the classroom would lead to increased satisfaction.

### **Cost of Education**

One major area of concern for participants was the cost of education in Ontario for international students. Jack and Sally mentioned that they had specifically chosen Canada, because of the affordability of education here. As Chira notes, “many students attracted by lower tuition and living costs seem to be more financially vulnerable” (2013, p. 3). While Jack and Sally did not share further concerns about cost, both Ava and Elizaveta identified the tuition costs to be immense. Ava particularly noted annual tuition hikes during her studies, feeling that the disparity between domestic international student tuition costs was unfair. Elizaveta actually labelled the difference in tuition fees as a form of discrimination. This financial challenge is also echoed in other studies (Banjong, 2015; C. P. Chen, 2011; Sherry et al., 2010; Yue, Lê, & Terry, 2014). Additionally, other researchers have found that “student participants deliberately [...] consider financial pressure as a judging instance for their responsibility for academic learning” (Thi Tran & Thi Phuong Vu, 2016, p. 13). The stress experienced by the cost of education is also significant in other students, as they strive “to minimise the expenses of education (‘I have to save a lot of money’) as a filial duty towards their parents” (Thi Tran & Thi Phuong Vu, 2016, p. 14). To conclude, it is reasonable then to interpret that there is a

great amount of stress placed on international students to complete their studies in the minimum amount of time possible, so as to minimize the financial cost to their families. Since it is not likely that universities would (or even could) reduce international student tuition, ensuring that international students are as successful as possible by providing excellent value for tuition, may be key in ensuring students are satisfied with their experiences.

### **Social Connections**

**Language barriers.** Before analyzing the data, it is important to note that all participants had attended at least 6 months of secondary school in Ontario, and that two of them are native English speakers. This certainly could have an effect on the information gathered regarding language barriers within Ontario universities, ultimately easing their integration to post-secondary institutions.

George noted that even as a native English speaker, cultural barriers sometimes played into his communications, particularly when slang did not ‘translate’ between Canadian and Malaysian English. He noted that these moments served to remind him of his otherness within the community. This sentiment has also been found a study of international medical students showing that students “struggle with verbal and nonverbal communication including slangs and idioms in their training setting” (Sokalingam et al., 2014, p. 406). Ee found that this can be more pronounced for women, “[since] English learners are not familiar with slang and sex-related vocabulary, female international students can easily be targets of sexual jokes and conversations” (2013, p. 73). In other studies, international students have specifically requested a safe space to work with English language speakers to learn slang and idioms to improve their language skills

(Sherry et al., 2010). This serves as a reminder that the cultural connotations of language can never be ignored, and that all international students are likely to need some assistance in navigating the intricacies of the language, even to simply be able to order a double-double at their local Timmies and pay with a toonie.

While none of the participants in this study noted barriers with language skills in terms of their academic or social standing, they did recognize that other international students do struggle (particularly in social situations), which will be discussed in the international student ‘cliques’ section. Many Ontario universities offer ESL programs to help international students gain the language skills needed for success. However, since language acquisition is a slow process and ESL programs are often as costly as undergraduate courses, this results in a financial barrier for some students. Other opportunities, such as tutoring, peer study groups, and nurturing interactions between international and domestic students to allow natural language acquisition, could allow for increased international student success. Interestingly, while research on Ontario universities has shown that “[l]anguage support was identified as a major service by almost all university campuses” (El Masri et al., 2015), few participants spoke of significant university support, referencing only tutors or conversation groups.

**Interactions between domestic students and international students.** Most participants felt that they had fully integrated into their university and had friends from a variety of groups, including domestic students. Amelia identified challenges in making friends but did not feel that this was due to discrimination. Sally also noted that she was intimidated by the domestic students when she began university. This is echoed in Ishiyama’s research about foreign students, where he found:

Not having mastered the necessary social skills [...], some foreign students suffer from a lack of recognition, encouragement, and no praise. Not knowing how to chit-chat or find common conversational topics sometimes prevents them from initiating a contact with host nationals. (1989, p. 47)

However, it is important to remember that both Amelia and Sally attended an Ontario secondary school for at least two semesters. It is likely, then, that they would be more comfortable with Canadians than international students whose initial entry to Canada was directly to a university program. Considering this, how much harder are interactions with domestic students for direct entry international students?

Jack noted that he had observed how international students attempted to form relationships but were unsuccessful, because the way they approached potential friends was deemed “creepy.” Ishiyama’s research on communication between international and domestic students echoes this, as “[t]hey may also experience discouragement and invalidation in situations where they expect to be recognized and rewarded by others in a culturally familiar way, but host nationals fail to respond in an expected way” (1989, p. 47). This disappointment can then lead to fear and feeds back into the desire to isolate oneself, leading to the next topic, international student ‘cliques’.

Universities could assist in relationship building between international and domestic students in a variety of ways, including: providing housing opportunities where international students are paired with domestic students; assigning domestic student mentors and guides to international students for assistance; ensuring that social events are actively promoted amongst international students; and encouraging teaching staff to promote inclusive classrooms. Some international students report that group work is

especially problematic (Elliott & Reynolds, 2014; Young & Schartner, 2014). In order to encourage inclusive classrooms, instructors should highlight the value that an international group brings, helping domestic students to appreciate this learning opportunity and avoid ethnic marginalization.

**International student ‘cliques’.** While no participants reported having interactions primarily with students from their home countries, Jack and George both described purposefully seeking out friends from other backgrounds and avoiding socialization with people from their home countries. This echoes research describing that “foreign youths may practise selective social avoidance. They may become excessively dependent upon others, or develop exclusive association with a co-national or host-national clique for certain comfort, inclusion, or status” (Ishiyama, 1989, p. 47). Both Elizaveta and Ava discussed problems encountered while connecting with international students who preferred to speak with other students, mainly in their native language. Both believed that this is often due to the comfort found in being able to communicate in their own language. This has been supported by Kudo and Simkin who found that “confidence in spoken English skills and increase in intercultural contact are interwoven” (2003, p. 103). Research by Moores and Popadiuk shown below, suggests that this kind of connections can be key to their success:

Supportive peers from the international student community were particularly identified as vital in easing the cross-cultural transition. Forming ties with other students from abroad was often easier than building other relationships because of a shared status as student sojourners, defined as temporary residents, and shared interests in exploring new cultures and creating new friendships. (2011, p. 296)

However, it has also been shown that:

Two thirds (65%) of the students who reported feelings of loneliness or isolation in Australia had faced barriers in making friends across cultures, compared to 36% of the nonlonely students. In other words, same-culture networks, however necessary, are not sufficient to overcome loneliness. (Sawir et al., 2007, p. 159)

This sentiment is echoed in research regarding Ontario universities, as “some respondents from counselling departments stated that IS’ (international students’) feelings of isolation and desire to build friendships with domestic students need to be addressed” (El Masri et al., 2015, p. 30). This implies that universities need to prioritize the integration between domestic and international students to ensure their mental wellbeing. This further suggests that university welcoming programs international students may need to be revised. Ava noted that in a dinner event organized by her faculty’s dean, international and domestic students were seated at separate tables. Additionally, many universities have separate orientation events for domestic and international students. For example, the University of Toronto offers an orientation event exclusively for international students, focused on the international student experience (“University of Toronto - Centre for international experience - Orientation,” 2015). There is much to discuss regarding this approach—as previously noted, cultural and language differences imply that international students have unique needs during orientation—, but it does restrict event participants from meeting their domestic peers during the first week, when many friendships begin. While not speaking directly about orientation, Jon found that “Korean students who participated in campus programs were more likely to interact with international students frequently and develop close relationships with them” (2013, p.

462). This may imply that first-year students participating in university organized orientation events would be more likely to form inter-cultural relationships. However, there are other ways in which universities can help maximize friendships opportunities between domestic and international students. Living in residence, for instance, is considered essential since “on-campus dormitories were more favourable than all the other types of accommodation to maximising the chances of intercultural contacts” (Kudo & Simkin, 2003, p. 98). Thus, universities should attempt to mitigate segregation effects between international and domestic students wherever possible, by ensuring cross-cultural interactions in residences, student clubs, and during sport events, among others. However, it may be also important to create safe spaces for international students to decompress from the stress of feeling like an ‘other’ within the academic environment.

### **Discrimination in Ontario**

None of the participants in the study felt that they had experienced personalized discrimination within Ontario. Jack did identify racial discrimination, but believed that the aggressors were simply using race as an excuse to be nasty, as opposed to what he perceived to be ‘real’ racism. This certainly does not correlate with my personal experience as a secondary school teacher in an international school, where my students share lived discrimination experiences. While it is possible that the participants were fortunate enough to be fully welcomed into their new communities, it does seem strange that none of the five racialized subjects experienced racism, nor any of the four participants who identified as women experienced sexism. This could perhaps be explained by research by Perry focused on Ontario colleges and universities. She found that “[f]or the most part, in spite of their awareness of concrete acts of bias motivated

violence and harassment (on campus), for most students this did not lead them to the conclusion that these incidents were part of an interconnected web of racism or sexism” (2010, p. 274). There are a multitude of reasons this could apply even to racialized students, including the fact that acknowledging discrimination would mean also acknowledging that their campus may not be a welcoming or safe space for them. It also presents the frightening notion that higher education is not, in fact, a meritocracy, and that their academic success may be impeded by factors other than their work ethic and scholarly achievements.

The sole white participant in the study identified that she had felt targeted as a white student leader, since she was told that the student government was too white. This may reflect that universities need to undertake anti-racism education with international students. However, this must be done in a safe way that allows the student to comprehend the subject without feeling attacked, since “[w]hite students [...] were more likely to understand the concept [of white privilege], particularly if they did not feel personally attacked” (Boatright-Horowitz, Marraccini, & Harps-Logan, 2012, p. 907).

**Internships and work-study positions for international students.** The lack of internships and work-study positions for international students was recognized by the participants as an area of concern and perceived as generalized discrimination. Elizaveta expressed her dismay, noting that Russian students were not permitted to undertake work-study employment unless it was required for graduation. While Ava is required to complete an internship for her program, she was unable to secure a placement, and directly attributed it to her international student status. Her experience is echoed in a study reporting that international students are unable to find positions in their area of



study (Nyland et al., 2009). Research in Ontario has shown similar themes, stating that “[o]ne key informant noted that many of their internship programs were restricted to Canadian citizens and permanent residents, which presents a challenge for international students” (R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2018, p. 58). While work placements result in multiple positive outcomes for students, including increased academic averages, valued skillset development and higher post-graduation employment rates (Brooks & Youngson, 2016; Jackson, 2017), excluding international students from these opportunities puts them at a disadvantage when compared to their domestic counterparts. Nyland et al. (2009) argue that universities need to take a more prominent role in protecting international student workers. I further argue that Ontario universities should guarantee that their international students have access to work placements to ensure their success. This is supported in the literature, as it has been shown that “the influence of professors and professionals in connecting international students to work cannot be underestimated and highlights the importance of specifically nurturing these kinds of relationships” (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014, p. 130). This may require additional training for international students to prepare them for placement interviews and recruitment events. The benefits of this training would be plentiful for both educational institutions and students.

### **University Support**

Participants were able to identify support programs for international students offered by their universities, including tutoring, conversation clubs, social events, and mentors. However, they also reported that these programs were not being used by

international students, due to the inefficacy of some programs and international students' reluctance to join them.

**Ineffective programs.** Jack remarked that international student programs at his university were mostly tailored to the biggest international student ethnic groups. Since his home country had a relatively small population at the school, the programs did not overly apply to his needs. He also observed that rather than supporting students as they work through problems, the programs often took over the responsibility. This approach did not allow students to learn how to complete specific tasks that may be beneficial once they left university.

Montsion (2018, p. 140) discusses the 'experience desk' as an opportunity for some Ontario universities to deliver services to international students, and notes that "the intent of the international desk is different in that it focuses on student integration into mainstream society". However, this does not mean that international students' voices are being heard. In fact, "one association representing international students has criticized its university's lack of a dedicated physical space. It advocates for distinct spaces to fight isolation and highlights the need to address some of the academic and social pressures experienced by its membership" (Montsion, 2018, p. 141). This does put universities into a quandary. It is clear that integration is necessary for the wellbeing of international students. However, it also seems evident that offering services simply aimed at integration, while ignoring the other facets of international student life, does not benefit either institution or student. Services such as mental health support and relationship building, as well as recreational activities (i.e.: shopping and eating), are often areas in

which international students may require active support to gain a personal benefit and cannot be addressed by an ‘experience desk’.

**Lack of use by international students.** Most participants felt that while support programs were available, these were not used by international students. Participants believed that this is mainly due to the fact that international students are burdened with the responsibility of seeking support, as universities do not seek out students in need of help. Both George and Amelia admitted to needing support but were not able to seek it out. George talked specifically about insecurity playing a role in not seeking assistance. Ava also felt that first year international students did not know how to access help, stating, “I haven’t found out [the services], but I think that they have the websites so we can go and search for what we want”. This mirrors a study that found that:

While both web scan findings and survey respondents indicated the strong presence of social events and orientation programs, when it came to other services such as buddy or mentoring programs, fewer were listed on institutional websites than reported through the survey [...]. This discrepancy was especially high for professional services, such as assistance with finding on-campus and especially off-campus jobs. These were not found to be advertised on some campus websites, though survey respondents from these same campuses acknowledged their availability. [...] Regardless, this suggests that institutional websites often do not reveal the entire range of IS programs or services offered. (El Masri et al., 2015, pp. 24–25)

Navigating the bureaucracy of a modern university can be overwhelming for even domestic students. Adding cultural differences can make this process unsurpassable.

During my time as an international teacher in China I had to be taught the ‘ritual refusal’, wherein Chinese culture one must refuse an offered invitation at least twice to be polite. Only when offered for the third time, one can then accept politely. Examples like this, offer insight as to why attempting to help international students via email, as Sally noted, does not encourage program attendance. Furthermore, based on the experiences of George and Amelia, it seems that struggling students are not flagged by the universities for further help.

It is clear that a more meaningful relationship with the university is needed to ensure that international students are able to access the help they need. Queens University was able to institute a program supporting first-year students in all aspects of university life. Results showed that it was very successful, highlighting that “[t]he program met its primary goals of ensuring the personal and academic transition needs of incoming students and establishing an early touch-point to raise awareness regarding mental health, self-care and awareness of specific resources as they relate to student success in higher education” (al Shaibah, Condra, Jama, & Stewart, 2017, p. 29). It is important to acknowledge that university staff certainly want to support the students and want the best outcomes for them. In fact, Harryba and Guilfoyle (2012) discuss the implications of stress among staff tasked with supporting international students. Nevertheless, additional supports needs to be provided to ensure that international are supported. This may include upper-year undergraduate volunteer mentors to work either individually or with small groups of international students. Regular mental health checkups could ensure that international students are not only achieving academically, but are also adjusting socially and emotionally. George suggested this when he expressed that while universities are

working on programs to assist international students with their mental health concerns, they are not proceeding quickly enough. Academics cannot be held responsible for identifying international students in need of help. In some cases, this may actually be impossible due to large sized lectures. Providing appropriate training to Teaching Assistants however, may become key in identifying students in need, as seminars and labs are significantly smaller and allow more one-on-one time.

### **Implications for Further Research and Practice**

Due to the constraints of a master's thesis, the participants were limited to graduates of an independent Ontario secondary school focused on educating international students. It is likely that these participants were better prepared for education in Ontario universities, than post-secondary international students without prior academic experience in the province. Ideally, more research should be conducted on the latter group to compare experiences. Additionally, while five of the six participants were racialized, they were all Asian. Including students from other ethnic backgrounds could also allow further analysis on how issues may disproportionately affect different international student groups.

While universities in Ontario are working to support their students, there is little data on how effective these support programs actually are. Further analysis of the mental, physical and social implications these programs have on international students, along with their academic benefits, could help devise a list of best practices to ensure student success.

Although international students are an incredibly diverse group with a variety of needs, universities tend to lump them together, and generally compress them to a single

specific group. Allowing analysis and comparison of different ethnic groups may elucidate how supports can be tailored to ensure all students are reached.

## **Conclusions**

The participants in this study identified several areas where their experiences in Ontario universities were problematic. These included concerns about the cost of tuition and how it is increasing, the lack of financial aid and scholarships available to international students, as well as a lack of internship and co-op positions. The participants also identified that while universities do endeavor to support international students, the efforts are often fruitless as international students don't know how to access the help, or the help is focused on areas that the universities feel are important, as opposed to the students themselves.

Social connections for these students were overall positive, with the participants, overall, discussing the fact that their friends were from a variety of backgrounds. However, they also identified that many international students were, in their opinion, self-siloing, spending time with only members of their own cultural groups.

Overall, the participants felt that their time in Canada was, in effect, devoid of incidents of racism and xenophobia.

## **Recommendations**

While it can be argued that university students should be considered adults and this therefore relieves universities from the responsibility of ensuring overall student wellbeing, the reality is that many Ontario students are now 17 years old in their first year. In my experience as a secondary school teacher of international students, even 16-

year-olds also go into first-year studies. These are not adults by any stretch of the imagination. Considering that, as the University of Rochester notes, “[i]t doesn’t matter how smart teens are or how well they scored on the SAT or ACT. Good judgment isn’t something they can excel in, at least not yet. The rational part of a teen’s brain isn’t fully developed and won’t be until age 25 or so” (“Understanding the Teen Brain,” 2018), it becomes apparent that many international students are physiologically and psychologically in need of additional support as they move through university life.

Since it is clear that many international students will not seek help on their own for a variety of reasons, universities need to find ways to reach out to students in need. The problem lies in identifying these students. One method could be through mentorships, where international offices link incoming international students with peer mentors. Staff members would supervise the program and in turn, provide guidance and advice to the peer mentors. This mentor would not only serve as a first source of counsel, but also as a guide while navigating campus culture and life.

International students also need assistance with life outside of campus. One simple way is to provide a basic how-to manual including topics regarding cultural differences, shopping, dining, contracts, rental issues, etc., along with contact information for further support when needed. This could ideally be provided in a variety of languages, helping students for whom English is a barrier.

As noted previously, there needs to be further investigation on the safety risks to international students, as it is clear that they are a vulnerable group. In the meantime, universities need to ensure that, as with any other high-risk group, these students are

protected as much as possible. This could be accomplished via safety seminars, guidebooks or one-on-one discussions with staff. It also has to be noted that based on personal experiences in their home countries, many international students do not trust police, and by extension, campus security. If the goal is to offer student protection through these services, then the university must work to educate students on the role of police and other security services in Canadian society. However, it would be negligent not to raise the concerns of racialized people and people with disabilities and mental health illnesses, regarding the abuse of trust by police forces throughout Canada. This has to be factored in when encouraging, for example, a young Black international student to seek police help.

The main social concern reported by international students is the integration with domestic students. Unfortunately, this will remain a struggle for universities. Finding ways to encourage this will not only ameliorate the experiences of international students, but will also likely help improve their academic skills, particularly in terms of English acquisition. This could be tackled by taking a series of measures beginning by ensuring that international and domestic students do not have separate orientation events. Other measures could include peer mentor programs; intramural sports encouraging teams composed of both domestic and international students; Canadian etiquette and culture events for international students to ease integration transitions; student housing programs purposely pairing international and domestic roommates; and peer academic support groups between domestic and international students.

Finally, and perhaps the most important way for universities to discover how to best serve international students, is by seeking the information directly from the students



themselves. This can be accomplished through focus groups of current students, individual student interviews or by surveying alumni and asking about the types of support that will help them in their journey. It is essential to acknowledge that there are cultural differences at play and to ensure that politeness and pride are not stopping students in need from accepting help.

## **Appendix A**

### **Letter of Invitation**

Title of Study: The Experiences of International Students in Canadian Universities

Principal Student Investigator: Leslie Klodt, M.Ed. Candidate, Faculty of Education, Brock University

Principal Investigator: Dolana Mogadime, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Brock University

You are invited to participate in a research study on the experiences of international students in Canadian universities. The study is also interested in the ways that the university may have helped you to adjust to your education within Canada, and how the university could have improved their support. In particular, the research is focused on any academic, social and emotional issues you may have gone through. Some of your responses may be due to discrimination you may have experienced. This research will require about 2 hours of your time.

The study will include 6 students. Columbia International College (CIC) has agreed to send this letter of invitation to students who have graduated from CIC in the past four years. From the students who reply by email to [leslie.klodt@brocku.ca](mailto:leslie.klodt@brocku.ca) expressing their interest in participating, 6 students will be randomly chosen. If you agree to participate and are chosen to be part of the study, you will be interviewed about your experience in university. The interviews will take place in person, in the meeting room of a library that is local to you and will be audio recorded. Following the interview, I will type your responses then I will provide you with a copy of the transcript to ensure that I have captured your answers accurately and that what was said was really what you meant to portray. All your responses will be kept confidential in a locked filing cabinet in my home office where only I will have access to the interview. In the final research paper that results from your interview and that of other students, I will use a pseudonym for both the schools and the individuals who were part of the research to ensure your anonymity. No identifying information will be given to previous schools you have attended.

This research should benefit international students who will be studying in Canada, hopefully highlighting areas where universities are successfully supporting their international students' success, as well as areas where the universities can better support their international students.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550, ext. 3035, [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca)).

In order to be a participant in this study, you must be a current undergraduate student at an Ontario university. You must be between 18-24 years of age and be in the process of obtaining your first undergraduate degree. You cannot be a Canadian citizen.

If you would like to participate in this research, please email me at [leslie.klodt@brocku.ca](mailto:leslie.klodt@brocku.ca) to express your interest. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information).

Thank you,

Leslie Klodt

Masters of Education Candidate

[leslie.klodt@brocku.ca](mailto:leslie.klodt@brocku.ca)

Dolana Mogadime, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Brock University

905 688 5550 x3733 [dmogadime@brocku.ca](mailto:dmogadime@brocku.ca)

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board 16-099 MOGADIME.

**Appendix B**  
**Participant Questionnaire**

Thank you for your interest in participating in our study. This questionnaire will allow me the chance to gather some preliminary information to determine who will participate in the study. Please answer the following questions.

- 1) Do you attend university in Ontario?    Yes    No
- 2) What year of your undergraduate degree are you in?    First    Second    Third    Fourth
- 3) What is your home country? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) How do you identify your gender?    Man    Woman    Trans\*    Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) What is your first language(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C**

### **Pre-interview script**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed and for being part of my research. During the interview, I will be using an audio recorder to make sure I catch your responses. Please be as detailed as you can be while answering the questions, as this will give me the information I need to complete the research study. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

## **Appendix D**

### **Interview protocol**

1. Could you describe yourself to me? How would you describe your age, race, gender, nationality, sexuality? Is there anything else I should know about you?
2. Can you describe the culture and society you were educated in before coming to study in Canada? How did you learn? How were you taught? Did you enjoy your education?
3. What made you choose to come Canada to study? What goals did you want to achieve by coming to study here?
4. What aspects of your education have you enjoyed while in Canada? Have you felt like a valued member of your classes? Has the university supported you in your education?
5. What aspects of your education have you not enjoyed while in Canada, both on a personal and systemic level?
6. Have you been academically successful while at university? Are there ways that your university could have helped support you to make you more successful?
7. Socially, how has your life outside of school been since coming to Canada? Are you easily able to form connections and friendships? Are there ways that your university could have helped you to be more successful?
8. Have you experienced discrimination during your time in university? If yes, could you please describe your experience(s)?

## **Appendix E**

### **Post-interview script**

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. In terms of your experiences in Ontario university, is there anything else you want to share? Once the interview has been transcribed, I will provide you with a copy and will ask you to let me know if there are any problems. As well, once the research has been analyzed, I will provide you with a copy of my analysis so you can again let me know of any errors you feel have been made. Thank you again!

## Appendix F

### Administrative Consent Letter

11/29/2016

[Redacted]

Attention [Redacted]

Dear [Redacted]

As part of my graduate studies in the Faculty of Education at Brock University, I am currently planning the research for my thesis focusing on the experiences of international students in Ontario universities. In order to source international students, I am requesting that [Redacted] send out a copy of my letter of invitation to [Redacted] graduates who have moved onto university studies within the past 5 years. To begin the project, I require your written consent.

The purpose of the study is to allow international students a voice, describing their experiences, academically, socially and emotionally, during their education at Ontario universities. It is my hope that this research will allow for examination of the areas where Ontario universities are effectively enabling their students for success and to find areas where we are failing these students and can provide them with the assistance they need to ensure their health and academic achievement. Six students will be chosen for participation in this study.

The study will be comprised of an interview, asking about participants' experiences attending an Ontario university. The letter of invitation will allow potential participants to see exactly what will be required, and allow them the choice to volunteer to participate or not. Should they choose to volunteer, they will be aware that they may leave the study at any point and that their information will be securely destroyed. As I acknowledge that some students may find questions about their studies to be challenging, counselling information will be provided to all participants. All information about participants and the universities that they attend will be kept confidential, with pseudonyms used in the final thesis. The information gathered will be kept securely in a locked filing cabinet in my home office or in the case of electronic data, kept encrypted and password protected, and access will be limited to myself and my thesis supervisor, Dr. Dolana Mogaidme. All data will be securely destroyed 5 years after the study is completed.

If you agree, please sign the letter below. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [Redacted] or at [leslie.klodt@brocku.ca](mailto:leslie.klodt@brocku.ca), or my supervisor, Dr. Dolana Mogaidme at 905 688 5550 ext. 3733 or [dmogaidme@brocku.ca](mailto:dmogaidme@brocku.ca). As well, if you have any other concerns, you can contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer at 905 688-5550, ext. 3035 or [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca)

Please find attached a copy of the Letter of Invitation. Should clearance be granted, I will provide this in an electronic form as well.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]

Leslie Klodt

Administrator's signature [Redacted]

Date

Dec 1/2016



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